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PRESS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE: Immediate

TOPIC: STOKES & MURPHY SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING SANCTIONS FOR FRIVOLOUS RACKETEERING CLAIM AGAINST THE BUENA VISTA PALACE HOTEL, DISNEY WORLD, INC., BVP MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES, *ET AL*

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Atlanta, Georgia (January 20, 1997)

On January 10, 1997, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit approved the imposition of sanctions against attorneys who had sued the Buena Vista Palace Hotel, Disney World and others for racketeering in *Guire, et al. v. Walt Disney World, Inc., BVP Management Associates, et al.*

The Eleventh Circuit affirmed a judgment previously issued by the federal district court in Orlando. Both courts concluded that the lawyers for the Plaintiffs had claimed frivolously that eight Defendants, ranging from a hotel banquet captain to the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, had violated the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, popularly known as "RICO."

As a sanction, the Court ordered the Plaintiffs' attorneys to pay \$67,000 of the Defendants' legal fees. This amount was in addition to over \$42,000 the Court previously ordered the Plaintiffs themselves to pay Defendants as reimbursement for the Defendants' litigation costs. The total of \$109,000 is believed to be the highest amount of attorneys' fees and costs awarded to a Defendant in an employment discrimination case in Florida history.

The appellate decision follows seven years of litigation in the federal courts. In October, 1989, eleven former full-time banquet employees of the Buena Vista Palace Hotel filed a lawsuit seeking compensatory and punitive damages in excess of \$5 MILLION against the Hotel, Disney, Equitable, and others. In addition to racketeering, the Plaintiffs accused the Defendants of age discrimination, wage and hour violations, emotional distress, wrongful discharge, and fraud.

Following a three-week trial in November, 1992, a federal jury in Orlando took less than two hours to return a unanimous Defense verdict. The Defense team at trial and on appeal was led by Arch Stokes and John Hunt of Stokes & Murphy, which specializes in representing the hospitality industry in litigation and employment law.