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POST IN DEPTH COURTS

# Ex-Martin official loses car, kayaks in judgment

Items once belonged to Maggy Hurchalla's sister, Janet Reno.

**By Kimberly Miller**

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Janet Reno's weathered kayak and 2004 Toyota Camry were seized in Stuart this week as a billionaire-backed mining company pursues a \$4.4 million judgment against Reno's sister, former Martin County Commissioner Maggy

Hurchalla.

The swirly blue kayak, bought in 1996 by Hurchalla so she and Reno could paddle the Potomac River when Reno was U.S. attorney general, was one of two taken from Hurchalla's yard Monday by the Martin County Sheriff's Office.

The seizure, which included only the two kayaks and aging Camry, is the latest twist in a years-long court battle brought by Martin County-based Lake Point Res-

**Hurchalla** continued on **A8**

# Hurchalla

continued from A1

toration against the 77-year-old Hurchalla. Lake Point is co-owned by former Wellington resident and one-time equestrian hopeful George Lindemann, Jr., who is heir to a cellphone and cable TV fortune.

A writ of execution signed Monday ordered sheriff's deputies to take the three items. The Camry, which has 207,000 miles on it and no air conditioning, replaced Reno's famous "little red truck" – the 1999 Ford Ranger pickup she drove during her 2002 campaign for Florida governor.

Reno died in 2016 at the age of 78 from complications of Parkinson's disease. She gave the Camry to Hurchalla when the disease made it difficult for her to drive.

"The value of what they are seizing is clearly not very much," said Hurchalla's attorney, Virginia Sherlock. "Lake Point doesn't have any interest in making money, or getting their judgment satisfied. They are just trying to hurt Maggy."

Kelley Blue Book puts the trade-in value of the Camry between \$754 and \$1,475. The kayak Hurchalla purchased for Reno in 1996 was bought used from a summer camp. The other kayak is 15 years old, Hurchalla said.

"She's a 77-year-old woman who still goes out in her kayak and enjoys it to clear her mind, and they've taken her kayaks away," Sherlock said.

Hurchalla, a stalwart Martin County environmentalist, lost a court case in February in which Lake Point charged that she lied to Martin County commissioners about the destruction of wetlands in an effort to kill a 2009 agreement that allowed the company to mine as part of a public works project with the South Florida Water Management District. Hurchalla was a private citizen at the time.

Lake Point's attorney, Ethan Loeb, said \$22 million in damages was done to



Former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno (third from left) and her sister Maggy Hurchalla (third from right) enjoy a kayaking trip. CONTRIBUTED

## Lake Point Restoration

Years-long litigation ended this fall with settlements between the South Florida Water Management District, Martin County and Lake Point Restoration over a public works project to ultimately turn mined land into water storage and treatment in western Martin County.



the company by the emails. The jury awarded Lake Point \$4.39 million.

"Ms. Hurchalla is trying to make this about the owners of Lake Point. It's not about them," said Lake Point spokeswoman Honey Rand in a statement about the property seizure. "At any point, Ms. Hurchalla could have admitted that she lied and the case would have gone away. She created this situation and she alone could have resolved it."

Hurchalla, who has an appeal pending in the 4th District Court of Appeal, said she was exercising her First Amendment right to contact her elected officials with concerns.

"There is something very childish about thinking that if they take away my car and toys I will burst into tears and stop defending the First Amendment," Hurchalla said. "The car and the kayaks can be replaced. The First Amendment cannot."

Lake Point also has garnished Hurchalla's bank accounts, Sherlock said.

For Lake Point, the February ruling against Hurchalla was a third victory in a five-year court battle that cowed the South Florida Water Management District and Martin County, both of which settled related cases with Lake Point in 2017. The district's settlement, approved in August, promises to buy 50,000 tons of rubble annually from Lake Point's mine in western Martin County for 15 years. After 50 years, the district gets the mined land for water treatment and storage ponds.

Martin County agreed to pay \$12 million for a non-appraised, 400-acre piece of land it doesn't want and write an apology to Lake Point principals, including Lindemann.

Neither Martin County nor the district were thrilled with the settlements. But both were willing to end the expensive legal wrangling with a deep-pocketed company bent on a win.

In an April 2017 meeting with water management board members, the district's attorney told them Lake Point was "out for vengeance" and that it wanted to "punish governments that wronged them." He said Lake Point wanted the lengthy legal machinations "to be painful."

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7-18-2018