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Ex-Lake Worth cop wins \$7.1 million from city in contract breach lawsuit



Police Officer Joseph Viera seen here in uniform holding his son, Joseph Jr., in a 2000 photo taken by a family member. (Joseph Viera/Courtesy)

By RAFAEL OLMEDA | rolmeda@sunsentinel.com | South Florida Sun Sentinel PUBLISHED: August 23, 2023 at 3:21 p.m. | UPDATED: August 23, 2023 at 6:19 p.m.



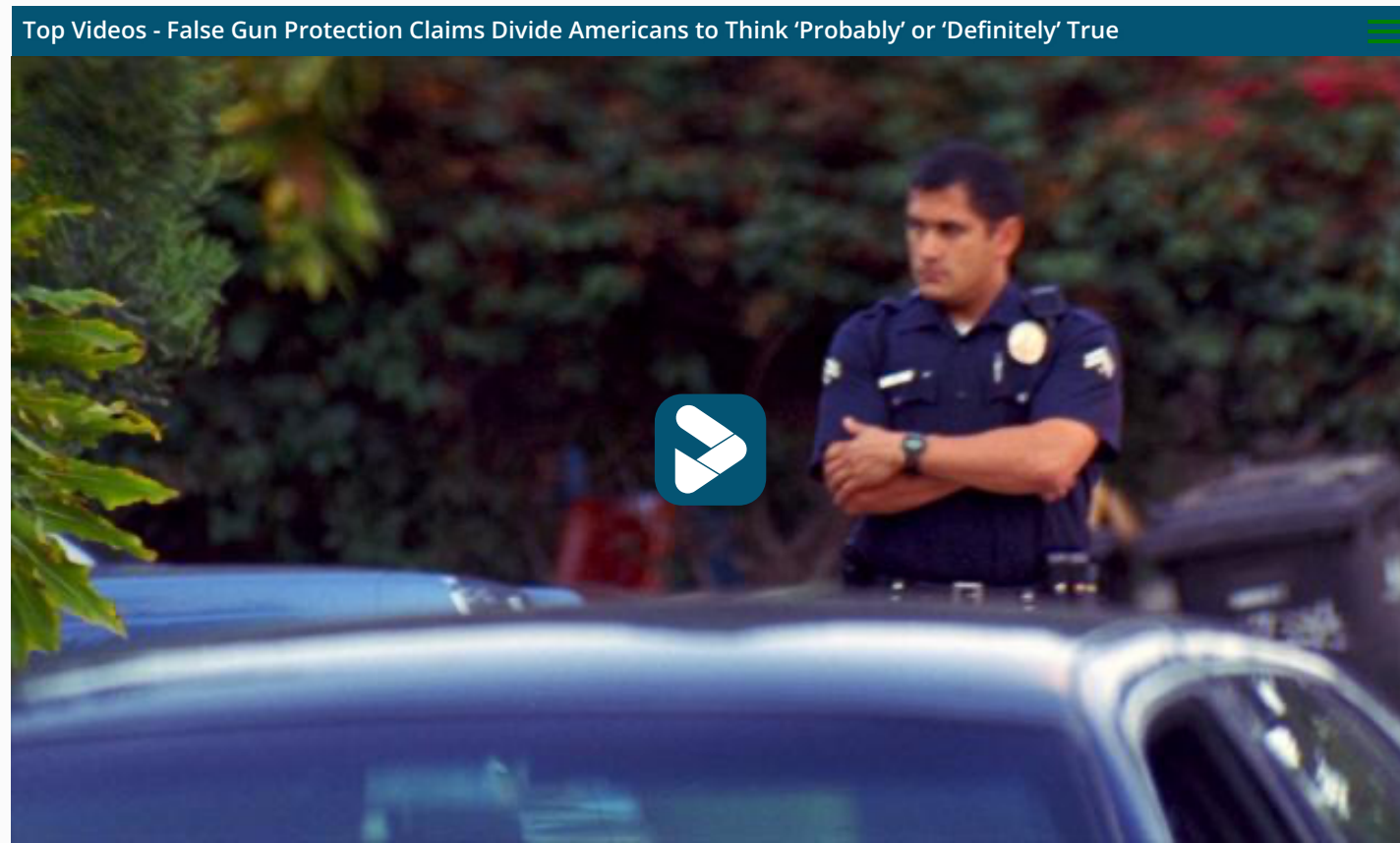
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Joseph Viera had been on the job as a Lake Worth Beach police officer for only eight months when the call came over. A woman was being attacked by two knife-wielding men. Viera answered the call.

But he never got there. Viera's patrol vehicle was T-boned on the way to the scene. Though he survived, he never worked as a cop again.

"My career was ended on Dec. 10, 2000," said Viera, who now lives in Colorado. "It took me years to learn how to walk again. I had to teach my son how to ride a bike from a wheelchair."

According to his lawyers, Viera was betrayed by the department that hired him, forced to fight for more than two decades for adequate compensation for his injuries. That compensation came earlier this month when a jury awarded Viera \$7.1 million.



"Our client ran toward his obligation to save a woman being beaten by two men," said his civil lawyer, Michael Pike, who works for the Pike & Lustig law firm. "The city ran from its obligation to provide this catastrophically injured officer all the benefits to which he is entitled."

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Viera's fight with the city appeared to be resolved in 2018, years after the city fought Viera's breach of contract claim above \$1 million.

That would not have covered the 25 major surgeries Viera has endured since the crash, the jury found.

"That's unfortunately part of the risk our police officers face," said Daniel Lustig, another of Viera's lawyers, also with Pike & Lustig.

Viera's lawyers argued that the city failed to live up to the 2018 settlement agreement to increase Viera's compensation. The jury agreed.

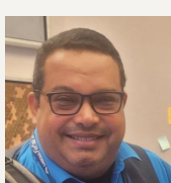
The city issued a statement indicating it intends to appeal the jury's Aug. 16 verdict.

Viera, 56, said he's hoping to live out his retirement without worrying about mounting medical bills.

"They accused me of making a career out of suing them,"

Viera said. "That's not what happened at all."

Lustig agreed. "His job wasn't suing them. His job became seeking justice."



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