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Mark Bethea Idea Theft Case against Mark Burnett Productions Will Begin Trial on Wednesday, May 31, 2006; Bethea Claims Burnett Stole Concept That Became “The Apprentice”

LOS ANGELES--(BUSINESS WIRE)--May 18, 2006--Trial in Mark Bethea's idea theft lawsuit against Mark Burnett and Mark Burnett Productions, Inc. will begin at 8:30 AM on Wednesday, May 31, 2006 in Los Angeles Superior Court/Department 52, 111 North Hill Street, Los Angeles, CA. 90012 before the Hon. Susan Bryant-Deason. Bethea filed a complaint for damages for breach of implied-in-fact contract and breach of confidence on March 14, 2005. He claims that Burnett used his idea for a reality-based television show called “C.E.O.” and turned it into “The Apprentice” which first aired in January 2004 on NBC television. Other defendants in the case include JMPB, Inc. and Conrad Riggs. *Bethea v. Mark Burnett et. al.*, Case No. BC330265.

Each side will give a five-minute presentation to the court outlining their case prior to the start of jury selection. Opening statements in the case are anticipated to start on Friday, June 2, 2006 at 8:30 AM and the trial is expected to last 2-3 weeks. Mark Bethea and his marketing/production company, Velocity Entertainment Group, are jointly represented by Browne Greene, Scott Carr and Michael J. Avenatti with the Santa Monica, CA. law firm of Greene Broillet Wheeler and Ronald W. Makarem, Marni B. Folinsky and Michael S. Makarem with the Los Angeles, CA. law firm of Makarem Associates.

In August 2000, Mark Bethea, age 44, conceived a reality television show entitled “C.E.O.” which had contestants competing against one another in a corporate environment for promotions, perks and benefits and which proposed Donald Trump as its host. Bethea registered a 5-page treatment of his idea for “C.E.O.” with the Writers Guild of America in Los Angeles on August 30, 2000. In February 2001, Bethea created a 12-minute PowerPoint presentation of “C.E.O.” which included text, video images, narration and music to facilitate marketing and pitching his idea.

In June 2001, Bethea was put in contact with Conrad Riggs, who is Mark Burnett's business manager and accepts pitches on Burnett's behalf. Bethea met with Riggs at his Santa Monica, CA. office and pitched him all three of his reality television ideas: “Air Combat,” “Speed Demons” and “C.E.O.” Bethea also gave Riggs treatments for all three shows and a copy of the “C.E.O.” PowerPoint presentation. Riggs informed Bethea that they were not interested in “C.E.O.” Throughout all of their communications, it was understood that all three of the projects that Bethea presented were to be kept confidential and that Defendants would not use any of Bethea's ideas without fairly crediting and compensating him.

On April 2, 2003, “The Apprentice” was announced to the public, and that it would be produced by Mark Burnett Productions, Inc. in association with Trump Productions, LLC., with Mark Burnett, Donald Trump and Jay Bienstock as Executive Producers and Conrad Riggs as Co-Executive Producer of the show. Bethea's efforts to contact the Defendants to be given screen credit and compensation for his original work were repeatedly rebuffed prior to the initial airing of the show.

“The Apprentice” debuted on NBC television on January 8, 2004, and Bethea claims that the show is a version of his original “C.E.O.” idea. Bethea filed this lawsuit on March 14, 2005.

Per the complaint, in just the first season alone, “The Apprentice” generated gross revenue in excess of \$100 million, with DVDs of the show and other products being sold domestically and internationally. “The Apprentice” is currently in its fifth season and a sixth season will air on NBC television in 2007.

“Mark Burnett and Conrad Riggs unscrupulously lifted Mark Bethea's ‘C.E.O.’ idea and incorporated its signature elements into ‘The Apprentice’ without giving Bethea any credit or compensation for his originality,” stated Browne Greene. “Although Burnett and Riggs are the current darlings of the reality television genre, they are not above the law. Our job is to put an end to their bullying and intimidation tactics and to see to it that Mark Bethea has his day in court.”

“This is one of the very rare idea theft cases to actually go to trial,” explained Ronald W. Makarem. “Most creative people won't challenge a powerful producer because they fear that they will be blacklisted and will never get a second chance in Hollywood. Mark Bethea is a man of principle and is standing up for what is right. ‘C.E.O.’ is his baby and he is not about to let anyone take it from him.”

Editor's Note #1

Mark Burnett and Conrad Riggs are also involved with JMBP, Inc., a California corporation associated with the production, trademarking and licensing of "The Apprentice" television show and its related products.

Editor's Note #2

Plaintiffs Mark Bethea and Velocity Entertainment Group are represented by Browne Greene, Scott Carr and Michael J. Avenatti with the Santa Monica, CA law firm of Greene Broillet Wheeler; Tel: 310-576-1200 and Ronald W. Makarem, Marni B. Folinsky and Michael S. Makarem with the Los Angeles, CA law firm of Makarem Associates, Tel: 310-312-0299.

Defendants Mark Burnett, Mark Burnett Productions, JMBP, Inc. and Conrad Riggs are represented by Steven A. Marenberg with Irell Manella, LLP, Tel: 310-277-1010.

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