

Crime

\$750K lawsuit over Yelp review will go to trial



By **Justin Jouvenal** January 27 [Follow @jjouvenal](#)

A [lawsuit filed by a D.C. contractor](#) who is seeking \$750,000 in damages from a woman whom he claims defamed his business in negative Yelp reviews is set to go to trial Monday in Fairfax County.

Christopher Dietz alleges a one-star review on the popular site and others were riddled with falsehoods and sent customers fleeing. Jane Perez stands by her claims that her home was damaged, she was billed for work that wasn't done and jewelry went missing after she hired Dietz's company to fix up her newly purchased Fairfax home.

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She closed one post: “Bottom line do not put yourself through this nightmare of a contractor.”

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The case is being [closely watched by First Amendment advocates](#) and businesses alike. First Amendment advocates say companies are increasingly turning to such tactics to stifle negative — but important — consumer information on review sites like Yelp.

Businesses say they are forced to take aggressive action because the Internet has allowed false claims to live on virtually forever and reach thousands of potential customers, doing untold harm.

Dietz says his eight-year-old design and contracting firm had a good reputation, before Perez hired him to do work on her townhome in 2011. Dietz was hired to refinish floors, perform plumbing work, paint and do other tasks.

But Perez said the work was shoddy and she had to spend thousands of dollars having it redone. She

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took to the Internet to express her displeasure. Dietz claims her negative reviews on Yelp and Angie's List cost him \$300,000 in business and took a toll on him personally. He says he performed the work as he was contracted to do.

Perez, a retired captain in the armed forces, said she was shocked Dietz decided to take legal action against her. She said she never imagined she might be sued over a posting on the site.

A Fairfax County judge [granted Dietz a preliminary injunction](#) that forced Perez to remove parts of her reviews, but the injunction was later overturned by the Virginia Supreme Court.

The trial begins the same month a Virginia court ruled Yelp had to reveal the identities of seven anonymous users, who posted critical reviews of the popular local company, Hadeed Carpet Cleaners. The company claims the reviewers weren't actual customers and posted false claims.

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