Settlement reached in wage theft case

By James Q. Lynch, The Gazette

IOWA CITY — Kossiwa Agenowossi finally has been paid.

The 38-year-old Coralville woman received a check Monday for nearly $2,200 for 40 days of work cleaning the now-closed Coralville Outback Steakhouse.

After waiting a year and a half to be paid, Agenowossi received no interest on what was owed her, but taxes had been taken out of the $2,346 she claims an Outback subcontractor owed her.

"We're ecstatic" that Agenowossi was paid, said Misty Rebik, executive director of the Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa in Iowa City. Agenowossi and the center shared their success story at a news conference Tuesday.

While happy with the Agenowossi settlement, Rebik is frustrated that it took so long and that neither the federal Department of Labor nor Iowa Workforce Development pursued criminal charges in the case.

She called it "crazy" that the agencies did not take the employer to court.

"You have employers who steal from workers, they admit it and are willing to pay, but they face no criminal penalties," Rebik said.

On the other hand, Rebik said the settlement would not have been possible if Labor had not taken the complaint seriously.

In its investigation, the federal agency found others who were owed money by the subcontractor, Rebik said.

However, the Department of Labor cannot confirm that there was an investigation, let alone comment on the settlement, according to Mike Steeell, an investigator in its Des Moines Wage and Hour Division. That's to protect the privacy of the employee and employer, he said.

Bloomin' Brands, which owns Outback, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In May, the center and labor unions organized a protest at the Cedar Rapids Outback Steakhouse to demand that Agenowossi be paid. Although Agenowossi did not work at the Cedar Rapids restaurant, Rebik said it used the same cleaning firm, which apparently was not licensed to do business in Iowa.

Iowa City company RockTenn accused of wage theft

By Mark Carlson, KCRG-TV9

IOWA CITY — The Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa plans to file a complaint against a large packaging supply company with a factory in Iowa City.

Activists say they are taking action against RockTenn, 2561 Independence Rd., after hearing numerous stories of alleged wage theft and other issues from current and former employees. Members of the Center for Worker Justice announced the move at a news conference on Tuesday.

The organization says RockTenn employees don't have set work schedules and have "constant uncertainty about whether wages will be paid for all hours worked."

The complaint will be filed with the U.S. Department of Labor, according to a news release from the organization.

The complaint also will include the names of Sedona Staffing and CFA Staffing, two temporary agencies that the Georgia-based company contracts with, according to Misty Rebik of the Center for Worker Justice.

Rebik said workers frequently are instructed to show up early for work, but they don't receive compensation for the 30- to 45-minute wait times before their shifts begin.

Representatives with RockTenn were not immediately available for comment Tuesday.