



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2010
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WASHINGTON BUSINESS OWNER AGREES TO PLEAD GUILTY TO CONSPIRACY TO DEFRAUD THE UNITED STATES IN AWARD OF GOVERNMENT CONTRACT

WASHINGTON — A founder and president of a Washington-area design firm has agreed to plead guilty for her role in a conspiracy to defraud the United States in the award of a government contract for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Justice announced today.

According to a one-count felony charge filed today in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, Darlene Mathis-Gardner conspired to defraud the United States in connection with the award of the contract by the General Services Administration (GSA). The department said that the conspiracy took place from in or about March 2007 until at least in or about March 2008. Mathis-Gardner is charged with conspiring with others to provide false information and documents to GSA officials in order to obtain a contract for interior design work to be performed on Potomac Center North in the southwest of Washington, a building that ICE was renovating as a new headquarters.

According to the court documents, Mathis-Gardner and her co-conspirators misrepresented independent contractors as the company's employees, submitted false information regarding their background and qualifications, and created fictitious documentation of the company's past performance in order to convince government officials that they were qualified to perform the work. Based on the misrepresentations and false documents, the government awarded Mathis-Gardner's company a contract worth approximately \$1.3 million. The plea agreement is subject to court approval.

Mathis-Gardner is charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for individuals. The maximum fine may be increased to twice the gain derived from the crime or twice the loss suffered by the victims of the crime, if either of those amounts is greater than the statutory maximum fine.

Today's charge is the first to arise from an ongoing investigation into procurement fraud occurring against ICE conducted by the Antitrust Division's National Criminal Enforcement Section (NCES), the ICE Office of Professional Responsibility and the GSA Office of Inspector General.

Anyone with information concerning collusion or fraud by businesses seeking ICE contracts is urged to call NCES at 202-307-5777 or visit www.justice.gov/atr/contact/newcase.htm, or contact the DHS tipline by telephone at 1-877-2INTAKE or by email at Joint.Intake@dhs.gov.

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