

NEWS

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Maplewood Man Admits Money Laundering;
Case Stems from “Operation Bid Rig” Corruption Probe

(More)

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NEWARK – A former employee of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority pleaded guilty today to conspiracy to commit money laundering, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

Leroy Robinson, 52, of Maplewood, who had been charged in March 2008 in a six-count Indictment with various money laundering offenses, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson to Count One of the Indictment charging him with conspiring with Joseph Merla to conduct financial transactions involving the proceeds of unlawful activity, namely loansharking, with the intent to conceal and disguise the nature of those transactions. Robinson was arrested in January of 2008 pursuant to a criminal complaint prior to being indicted in March of this year.

The count to which Robinson pled guilty carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000. Judge Thompson scheduled sentencing for March 10. Robinson remains on bail pending sentencing.

During the plea proceedings, Robinson admitted providing five checks totaling \$108,000 between April 2004 and February 2005 to three individuals in exchange for \$120,000 in cash, which he believed represented loansharking proceeds. Robinson admitted that he had believed that the individuals from whom he had accepted the cash were involved in the contracting business but also ran a profitable loansharking operation. In reality, these individuals were a cooperating witness and two undercover FBI agents, according to Mark J. McCarren, the Assistant U.S. Attorney who handled the prosecution.

The guilty plea of Leroy Robinson represents the most recent conviction to arise from Operation Bid Rig, the same investigation which has led to charges against more than 20 officials in Monmouth, Ocean and Somerset Counties, including convictions of the former mayors of Asbury Park, Ocean Township, West Long Branch, Brick Township, Hazlet and Keyport.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Thompson will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, a defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system and thus defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all the time imposed by the court.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with the investigation that resulted in today's charges.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney McCarren.

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Defense Counsel: Walter Timpone, Esq., of Morristown