

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 12, 2007

Asbury Park Restaurateur Pleads Guilty to Money Laundering

– Admits passing \$2000 bribe to former Asbury Park Deputy Mayor Hamilton –

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NEWARK – The owner of an Asbury Park restaurant pleaded guilty today to laundering cash from an individual who held himself out as involved in construction and demolition work, money laundering, and illegal loansharking, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Vincent “Vinny” Baker, 63, who was indicted along with former Asbury Park Deputy Mayor and Councilman John J. Hamilton, Jr., 57, entered his plea in U.S. District Court in Newark before Judge José L. Linares to Count Four of a Superseding Indictment which charges him with money laundering. Judge Linares continued Baker’s \$50,000 unsecured bond pending sentencing, which is scheduled for Dec. 19.

At his plea hearing, Baker admitted that in June 2002 he “legitimized” approximately \$15,000 by depositing cash into bank accounts he controlled and then issued checks to an individual, who unbeknownst to him was a cooperating witness with federal law enforcement authorities, for bogus work that was never performed in exchange for a 10 percent fee.

Baker admitted that in April and May 2001, prior to the money laundering transaction, he had described Hamilton to the cooperating witness as someone who might be willing to accept money. Baker admitted that he introduced the cooperating witness to Hamilton as a “contributor” who was “looking for work” and that he accepted \$200 from the cooperating witness for the introduction. Furthermore, Baker admitted that he accepted \$2,000 in cash from the cooperating witness to give to Hamilton and then gave the money to Hamilton.

Baker also admitted that on various occasions between May and August 2001 he discussed with the cooperating witness and Hamilton the installation of a driveway at Hamilton’s home, which was to be done by the cooperating witness. Baker stated that a new driveway was installed at Hamilton’s home by the cooperating witness in August 2001.

The trial against Hamilton is scheduled to proceed on Oct. 2, 2007.

The charge to which Baker pleaded guilty carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Linares will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the 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. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Wesley Dun, with developing the case against Baker.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Joyce M. Malliet and Thomas J. Eicher, Deputy Chief, of the Special Prosecutions Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: Lisa M. Mack, Esq. (Newark)