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NEWS RELEASE



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Three Sentenced for Payroll Fraud & Other Schemes Against Hotel Owner

Case #: 2019026856

VENTURA, Calif. - District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced the sentencing of three defendants who embezzled from the owner of three hotel properties.

Alejandro Mendez Hernandez (DOB 12/7/72) of Fair Oaks, and Shawn Eldon Nichols (DOB 07/21/64) of Lawndale, were sentenced to six years in prison. Ruth Bernardo Naranjo (DOB 03/13/71) of Hawthorne, was placed on two years felony probation. All three defendants were also ordered to pay \$1 million in restitution.

Hernandez and Nichols were longtime managers of three hotels owned by the victim, two in Oxnard and one in Calabasas. Naranjo is the wife of Hernandez and had worked briefly at one of the hotel locations.

From 2013 to 2018, the defendants used a form of payroll fraud, where they issued paychecks in the names of former or fake employees and then deposited the checks for themselves. The defendants also paid themselves unauthorized bonuses, diverted vendor payments and hosted events at the hotels they fraudulently did not pay for.

Their schemes were finally discovered when former hotel employees came forward to report tax forms which overstated their earnings. The three defendants pled guilty on October 5, 2022, to nine felonies and admitted the special allegation against them.

This case was prosecuted by Senior Deputy District Attorney Marc Leventhal, a member of the Ventura County District Attorney's Office Fraud and Technology Crimes Unit.

Defendant Information:

Alejandro Mendez Hernandez
Fair Oaks, CA

Shawn Eldon Nichols
Lawndale, CA

Ruth Bernardo Naranjo
Hawthorne, CA

Charges/Allegations Admitted:

- PC 182(a)1 (Conspiracy)
- (4 counts) PC 487(a) (Grand Theft)
- (4 counts) PC 530.5(a) (Identity Theft)
- PC 186.11(a)(2) (Aggravated White Collar Crime Enhancement - Taking of More than \$500K)



Alejandro Mendez Hernandez

Shawn Eldon Nichols

Ruth Bernardo Naranjo