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BOSSIER PARISH SCHOOL BOARD EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO DEFRAUDING BOSSIER PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Shreveport, Louisiana: Winfred “Randy” Johnston, Jr., 47, of Plain Dealing, La., one of five defendants indicted in December for defrauding the Bossier Parish School Board in connection with the purchase and maintenance of air conditioning systems, has pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced today. Johnston was employed by the Bossier Parish School Board as the Maintenance Department Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning Supervisor. The guilty plea was entered before United States District Judge S. Maurice Hicks, Jr. Sentencing is set for May 28, 2009 at 1:30 p.m.

Co-defendant Mark Edward Rowe, also employed by the School Board, and co-defendants Alan Victor Lee and Garrett Gene Wilson, co-owners of Ark-La-Tex Air Repair, Inc., have previously pleaded guilty to one count of mail fraud each and will be sentenced in May 2009. Ark-La-Tex Air Repair, Inc. pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit mail fraud. The corporation itself was named in last month’s indictment, and the corporation’s guilty plea will facilitate the forfeiture of corporate assets that are proceeds of the crime.

The scheme to defraud involves Ark-La-Tex Repair, Inc. and approximately \$8.6 million worth of air conditioning contracts from the School Board between 2004 and 2008. During this same time, Johnston and Rowe admitted that they falsely certified that the proper equipment was in place and failed to conduct proper inspections. Johnston and Rowe also admitted they approved invoices for payment when they knew that the invoices contained false information and that Air Repair did not perform the work listed on the invoices. In return, Wilson and Lee provided Johnston, Rowe and others with cash and other things of value.

Wilson and Lee admitted that they and their company, Air Repair, charged the School Board for more expensive equipment than was actually installed, charged for equipment that was never installed at all, and charged for replacing air conditioning units that were functioning properly. Wilson and Lee also admitted that their co-defendants, who were School Board employees, were allowed to swipe their Maintenance Department credit cards at Air Repair to receive cash, with bogus invoices subsequently generated to cover up the fraud. As a result of the scheme charged in the indictment, the School Board was defrauded in excess of \$780,000.

Johnston faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

A six-month investigation by the FBI code-named "Screaming Eagle" led to the indictment which remains pending against one co-defendant.

This investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Shreveport Resident Agency, with the assistance of the Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alexander C. Van Hook and Robin S. McCoy.

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