Contractor Implicated in Chicago Area Bribery Case Surfaces in Federal Investigation of Dolton Mayor Tiffany Henyard

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At the urging of Mayor Tiffany Henyard, the Village of Dolton paid a west suburban construction company — linked to multiple corruption cases — more than $200,000 in no-bid, no-contract work to replace senior homeowners’ roofs and windows.

Now, federal investigators are seeking records from Dolton officials concerning the construction project undertaken by Summit-based O.A.K.K. Construction Co., owned by Alex Nitchoff. His family ran a restaurant in town, and his father once engaged in an apparent scheme to attempt to clear hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid taxes from properties the family owned in the village.
Alex Nitchoff, O.A.K.K.’s president, is awaiting sentencing after he pleaded guilty in January to bribing a Cook County assessor’s official for property tax breaks. His late father, Boris, was implicated in a home renovation bribery scheme involving former Chicago Ald. Carrie Austin (34th). O.A.K.K. construction was subpoenaed as part of the federal investigation of Austin, the Sun-Times reported in 2019. An attorney for Alex Nitchoff declined to comment. Austin has denied any wrongdoing.

Federal subpoenas were issued this spring to the Village of Dolton and Thornton Township, where Henyard is the supervisor, and records show O.A.K.K. was named in the Dolton subpoena. They are part of an ongoing and intensifying federal investigation into Henyard, the self-styled “supermayor,” whose
controversial governing style and decisions have generated national and international news coverage.

Dozens of businesses, government employees, political figures and members of Henyard’s inner-circle are named in the wide-ranging subpoenas, which also seek spending records from multiple trips, including a October 2022 trip that Henyard and supporters of her cancer nonprofit foundation took to Springfield to promote a breast cancer bill. The bill, though, had not been filed, and the State Legislature wasn’t in session, as first reported by the Illinois Answers Project and Fox 32 Chicago.

Other people or organizations named in the subpoenas include:

- Henyard’s nonprofit that claims to help cancer victims, “The Tiffany Henyard Cares Foundation,” which she financed using township money. The Illinois Attorney General’s Office is investigating the foundation, which is barred from fundraising after failing to submit required documentation.

- Jose Aldaco, a businessman from Bensenville, who billed the township $17,000 for 1,000 T-shirts and sweatshirts ahead of the journey that Henyard and members of her foundation took to Springfield. The federal subpoena asked for records related to that specific T-shirt invoice submitted by Aldaco’s company. The invoice came one day after the paperwork creating Henyard’s foundation was submitted to the state. Messages left for Aldaco were not returned.

- Kamal Woods, who is identified in divorce records as Henyard’s boyfriend, works under Henyard at the township and is a director of her foundation. Woods earns a “highly lucrative salary — in excess of $100,0000 per year” working at the township in addition to his side gig providing private security for local government, according to his divorce case. Woods hung up when reached for comment.

- Keith Freeman, the initial registered agent for Henyard’s foundation, who is also the village manager and Henyard’s paid senior advisor at the
township. Freeman is charged with bankruptcy fraud after allegedly shielding income he made from the Village of Robbins, the Village of Dolton, Thornton Township and a Northfield-based company that leases vehicles to poor municipalities at high rates. Freeman has pleaded not guilty and did not return emails and phone messages seeking comment.

- Michael Kasper, the election attorney for former Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, who helped Henyard defeat a recall effort in 2022. Messages left for Kasper were not returned.

- Former Calumet City Mayor Jerry Genova, who was sentenced to five years in prison on corruption charges in 2002, worked on a campaign for Henyard’s slate of candidates in 2023. Genova said in a statement that he has worked as a marketing and economic development consultant for 30 years and that he “works for a private firm that provides consulting services to Thornton Township and other governmental and corporate clients throughout the Southland and Chicago area.”

As for the Nitchoffs, they are a longtime fixture in Dolton, having owned and operated Olivia’s Restaurant — a well known diner in town that has since been turned over to new ownership.

They are also absentee landowners. A Chicago Sun-Times investigation showed that the Nitchoffs attempted to evade several hundred thousand dollars in unpaid property taxes on Dolton properties by letting their taxes become delinquent and then rebuying the properties through shell companies for a fraction of the debt through Cook County scavenger or tax sales.

All the while, Nitchoff’s businesses were active in Dolton political affairs, contributing more than $8,600 over seven years to former Mayor Riley Rogers. In February 2022, they contributed $2,000 to Henyard’s campaign and another $5,000 four months later. The latter contribution occurred days after O.A.K.K. first billed the village for the no-bid, no-contract residential construction at several dozen homes that totaled $205,000, money that the village paid out of federal COVID-19 grant money.
Having never authorized the work, the Dolton village board initially refused to pay the bills. O.A.K.K. responded by sending letters to the senior homeowners, threatening to put liens against their homes.

“I am really confused right now,” resident Rose Rice wrote in an email to village officials. “First of all, I didn’t sign any papers or an agreement with this company, so why is this lien against my property and why is my name on this document ... This is asinine.”

Workers outside a home in Dolton do work on the roof under a village program. (Credit: Screenshot of Village of Dolton promotional video)

John Bodendorfer, O.A.K.K.’s construction manager, apologized during a December 2022 village board meeting and said the letters should have been mailed to the mayor and village board instead. He said he was “seeking payment for the work that we completed for the homeowners.”

At the same meeting, village trustees, a majority of whom oppose Henyard, criticized the process and asked Henyard how she picked the contractor.

“If you don’t get a (bid), you get contractors who donate to her campaign fund,” said then-village trustee Edward Steave. “That’s reality. Because the mayor should not have all the power to pick the contractors, pick who she wants, and then she goes to them for campaign donations.”
Henyard said she announced at an earlier board meeting that they needed contractors to do the work and O.A.K.K. signed up.

“I don’t go pick people,” Henyard said. “People come to the village, they apply and they want to do it and they do the work. I could care less who does it as long as the resident gets the service.”

Because the cost of each job did not exceed $5,000, Henyard said the village was not required to seek other proposals to comply with the requirements of the federal grant money the village used to pay for the project.

“I’m asking again for the board to make them whole, pay them what’s owed to them so they can complete the process ...” Henyard said.

After Village Trustee Jason House asked for a copy of O.A.K.K.’s contract and its customers, Henyard made it clear that none existed: “For the record there is no contract. No one has a contract.”

Bodendorfer declined to comment for this story. He pleaded not guilty to federal charges that he gave jewelry, meals, sports tickets and home improvement materials to Lavdim Memisovski, a commercial group leader at the Cook County assessor’s office, for tax breaks on the Nitchoff family properties that exceeded a half-million dollars. His boss, Alex Nitchoff, pleaded guilty to bribery charges in January.
John Bodendorfer answers questions at a Dolton Village Board meeting in 2022 regarding the city’s program to do construction work on seniors’ homes in town. (Credit: Screenshot of video of village board meeting.)

Nitchoff’s late father, Boris, was implicated in the federal corruption case against Austin, the former alderperson, after he allegedly provided her with sump pumps and kitchen cabinets in her home as he sought business from the City of Chicago.

Records show the Village of Dolton also paid O.A.K.K. Construction $14,500 to build a fence around the property that became a publicly-owned ice rink that was used for one of Henyard’s campaign events without her campaign paying for it, in an apparent violation of state election law.

Freeman, the village manager, said at the December 2022 trustee meeting that the critics were ignorant of the federal grant reporting rules and accused them of “gaslighting.”

“It’s like you want to start a fight,” he said.

Freeman was indicted in April for bankruptcy fraud after allegedly underreporting income for multiple years in a bankruptcy filing earlier this year.

Freeman is accused of falsely reporting that his 2023 income was $99,647 when it
was approximately $195,000. He also allegedly failed to report that Village of Robbins, where he formerly worked as village manager, had a claim against him because he received about $90,396 “in excess of his authorized salary.”

The indictment also alleged that a Northfield company that uses high-interest loans to sell firefighting vehicles and other municipal equipment paid him $24,500 in consulting fees from December 2021 through January 2022 — income he also did not list on his bankruptcy filing.

The subpoenas issued to Thornton Township and the Village of Dolton sought records related to First Government Lease, of Northfield, and its president Paul Graver. Records show that the Securities and Exchange Commission fined Graver $50,000 in 1992 after he took part in “three schemes to fraudulently induce the purchase or sale of securities.”

Records show the Village of Dolton leased a 2023 Chevrolet Tahoe from the company for five years for $149,000 in all — with nearly $56,000 of overall price tag coming from loan and interest costs.

Village Trustee Kiana Belcher, who criticized the lease agreements in a September 2023 board meeting, said that Dolton leases multiple vehicles from the company.

Graver did not return messages for comment.