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Ex-Aviation Contractor Pleads Guilty To Firearm Charges

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GREENSBORO, N.C. -- A former aviation contractor has pleaded guilty to firearm charges stemming from his arrest during a sweep of illegal immigrants working at Piedmont Triad International Airport.

Jorge Ruiz, 60, struck a plea bargain with prosecutors in which he admitted to lying about his citizenship when buying a shotgun last year in Greensboro. He also pleaded guilty to another firearm charge, but will not be sentenced until September and will remain behind bars until then.

Ruiz was a coordinator for a Florida-based company that provided temporary workers to TIMCO Aviation Services.

Ruiz was among 27 arrested on immigration charges at the airport after federal agents screened TIMCO's employee records. It was part of a federal initiative to keep illegal immigrants from working in security-sensitive industries.

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Aviation Contractor Pleads Guilty

News & Record, May 13, 2005 www.News-Record.com
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GREENSBORO

A former aviation contractor pleaded guilty Thursday to firearm charges stemming from his arrest March 8 in a sweep of illegal immigrants working on aircraft at Piedmont Triad International Airport.

Jorge Ruiz, 60, struck a plea bargain with prosecutors in which he admitted lying about his citizenship when buying a shotgun last year in Greensboro. He also pleaded guilty to one count of "possession of a firearm in commerce by an illegal alien."

But in the agreement, prosecutors said they "will not oppose" dismissal of other charges against him - including that he provided another illegal immigrant with fake documents to get work in aircraft repair at TIMCO.

Ruiz was a coordinator for a Florida-based company, S.M.A.R.T., that provided temporary workers to TIMCO.

"He denies all that stuff about passing on the fake cards," said his attorney, John Carlyle Sherrill III of Salisbury.

"He was actually turning down people (seeking work) if they had fake cards that he could tell were fake."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Douglas Cannon said the plea agreement was "absolutely not" a concession that the false document charges were untrue.

But the government likely would have to go to trial to prove them, he said. Among other things, that could mean exposing identities of confidential witnesses for a possible conviction unlikely to net a sentence much stiffer than what Ruiz will receive for Thursday's guilty plea, Cannon said.

"This conserves judicial resources and achieves the governmental purpose," he said.

Ruiz is a Venezuelan citizen who has lived in the United States for years and is about to be granted status as a temporary resident by immigration authorities, Sherrill said.

Ruiz was among 27 arrested on immigration charges at PTI after federal agents screened TIMCO's employee records. It was part of a federal initiative to keep illegal immigrants from security-sensitive industries.

The criminal complaint involving fake documents said the information came "from a cooperating citizen believed to be reliable and trustworthy."

That informant was "an unauthorized alien" in October 2000 when Ruiz allegedly gave him a fake green card and a counterfeit Social Security card, according to the March 16 criminal complaint. In the complaint, D. Brent Perley, a special agent for the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said he found a copy of the alleged fraudulent green card in S.M.A.R.T. business records.

In a telephone interview Thursday, Ruiz's daughter, Patty, said his family is gratified the fake-document allegations will be dropped. "He's honest. He has never committed a crime and he is a good dad," his daughter said, adding she's disappointed he won't be sentenced until Sept. 14 because it means more months behind bars.

Sherrill said that by then, Ruiz will have served about the time federal guidelines suggest for the two firearms offenses.

U.S. District Judge James A. Beaty Jr. accepted Ruiz's guilty pleas but denied Sherrill's request he be released on bond pending sentencing.

Contact Taft Wireback at 336-373-7100 or twireback@news-record.com

An unrelated, but relevant story.

<http://www.thejournalnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050513/NEWS02/505130370/1018>

Painting contractor charged in wage 'exploitation' case

By BILL HUGHES

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THE JOURNAL NEWS - The Online Information Source for Westchester, Rockland, and Putnam County, New York
(Original publication: May 13, 2005)

A Rockland County contractor was accused of charging \$110,000 to paint a Mount Vernon middle school, paying workers less than he billed the school for and pocketing the difference.

Michael Salerno, 38, and his company MCS Painting Contractors Inc., located at 5 Washburn Lane in Stony Point, are charged in a six-count indictment alleging that Salerno paid both union and non-union employees well below the prevailing

wage of \$32 per hour, then falsified billing statements to indicate that he had.

Flanked by representatives of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, Westchester County District Attorney Jeanine Pirro announced the indictment at a news conference yesterday and vowed to prosecute anyone caught violating labor laws in the county.

"This is about the exploitation of the little guy," Pirro said.

Pirro said Salerno won the bid for a contract to paint the A.B. Davis Middle School in Mount Vernon in August and was legally bound by the terms of the contract to pay the prevailing wage plus \$14 per hour toward benefits.

Salerno allegedly paid two union employees the prevailing wage, but hired 10 non-union employees and paid them a flat rate of \$1,000 per week to work 14-hour days.

In paperwork he filed with the school district, Salerno allegedly claimed he paid two union employees the proper amount to complete the entire job. He and his company are charged with three felony counts each of falsifying business records and offering a false instrument for filing.

A message left at MCS seeking comment was not returned.