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District of Kansas

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LEAWOOD WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO MORTGAGE FRAUD

KANSAS CITY, KAN. – **Victoria Bennett**, 35, Leawood, Kan., has pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and money laundering, and one count of wire fraud, Acting U.S. Attorney Marietta Parker said today.

In her plea, Bennett admitted that from January 2002 through January 2008 she conspired with co-defendant **Wildor Washington, Jr.**, and others to fraudulently obtain mortgage loans. Washington owned or controlled various businesses including Heritage Financial Investments, Legacy Enterprises, Atlantic Mortgage, Inc., The Real Estate Group, J.T.F. Enterprises, Liberty Escrow, AMSTAR Mortgage and Horizon Development. Bennett worked for Washington and processed loans generated by Washington's businesses.

Washington and other conspirators submitted false and fraudulent property appraisals to various lenders. Documents produced by the conspirators included inflated property values and forged signatures of licensed appraisers. Bennett knew many of the documents submitted to lenders were false, but she aided in their submission anyway.

The conspirators targeted low-income borrowers and borrowers who lacked experience with real estate transactions. They enticed borrowers to apply for real estate loans by promising them loans regardless of their credit rating or financial situation. At the time of closing, the conspirators imposed excessive or unexpected loan origination fees and appraisal fees, as well as higher interest rates.

Bennett admitted, for instance, that in November 2003 she assisted Washington and others in preparing and submitting a loan application on a home in the 4600 block of West 146th Street in Leawood, Kan. The application falsely represented that the applicant earned \$21,958 a month. As a result, the conspirators unlawfully obtained \$198,266.

Sentencing is scheduled for July 6, 2009. She faces a maximum penalty of 5 years and a fine up to \$250,000 on the conspiracy charge, and a maximum penalty of 20 years and a fine up to \$250,000 on the wire fraud charge.

Co-defendants include:

- **Scott Alexander**, who pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing.
- **Terrence Cole**, who pleaded guilty and is awaiting sentencing.
- **Wildor Washington, Jr.**, who is awaiting trial.
- **Maurice Ragland**, who is awaiting trial.
- **Kara E. Robinson-Franks**, who is awaiting trial

Parker, who prosecuted the case, commended the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigations Division, the Johnson County Sheriff's Department, the Overland Park Police Department and the U.S. Secret Service's Financial Crimes Task Force for their work on the case.

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