

Attorney General Bill McCollum News Release

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Participant in \$13 Million Mortgage Fraud Scheme Convicted by Polk County Jury

TALLAHASSEE, FL – Attorney General Bill McCollum today announced that the final participant in a multi-million dollar mortgage fraud scheme has been convicted by a Polk County jury after only 45 minutes of deliberation. Samuel Green faces up to 60 years in prison for his role in the scheme which spanned more than two years and involved loans in Hillsborough, Lee, Pinellas and Polk counties. Green and his co-defendants were prosecuted by the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution.

The three-year investigation began when victims filed complaints about incomplete or substandard construction work being performed by construction companies affiliated with co-defendant Scott Almeida. Almeida and his associates secured mortgages for homeowners to finance the home repair projects by submitting fraudulent documents to Argent Mortgage Company. Co-defendant Orson Benn, as vice president of Argent, approved or oversaw the approval of the fraudulent loan applications. Green also worked for Argent as an account manager and a regional production manager and assisted with the approval of the loans.

Investigators followed the trail of fraudulent applications back to the organized criminal operation which submitted nearly 130 loans to Argent that were funded for approximately \$13 million. Argent Mortgage has cooperated with investigators and provided information and documents to support the investigation. The joint investigation was conducted by the Office of Statewide Prosecution, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), the Hillsborough County Consumer Protection Agency, the Tampa Police Department and the Pinellas County Department of Justice.

Almeida pleaded guilty last October and will serve 10 years in prison for the crimes he committed. Benn was convicted by a jury in July and will be sentenced in September. Co-defendants Frank Giffone, Adrienne White and Bradford Peck have all pleaded guilty to similar charges; Giffone and White will be sentenced at a later date and Peck was previously sentenced to eight years in prison. Green will be sentenced in October.