

# JOBS APLENTY FOR EX-TOP

## Records detail Regina Evans' hiring for nonprofit and in Country Club Hills

BY CASEY TONER

ctoner@southtownstar.com

As part of a venture that led to the indictments of former Country Club Hills Police Chief Regina Evans and her husband, Ronald Evans Jr., for allegedly skimming from a \$1.25 million state grant, they paid family and acquaintances with money that was supposed to go to a nonprofit group she ran, federal investigators say.

When the nonprofit group unraveled, some of those acquaintances were hired to work for Regina Evans at the Country Club Hills Police Department, records show.

Now, as the Evanses prepare for their upcoming federal trials on mail fraud and money-laundering charges, some of those who were hired say they saw signs of trouble, including an accountant who questioned whether the nonprofit program ever existed and another who said, "I'm taking myself out of this" when he became suspicious something wasn't right.

Those hired by the Evanses included Regina's brother, the daughter of a prominent South Side minister, a former Chicago cop on parole after killing a teen in a car crash and the daughter of the state employee tasked with ensuring the grant money was spent properly, a SouthtownStar analysis found.

### Background

The nonprofit started by the Evanses, We Are Our Brother's Keeper, secured a \$1.25 million state grant from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity in February 2009. The money was supposed to be used to help train 40 workers involved in restoring the dilapidated New Regal Theater on Chicago's South Side.

But federal investigators say the Evanses misappropriated more than \$500,000 of those grant funds, using almost half for the mortgage on the Regal building and payments to their friends, family, associates and to Regina Evans between February 2009 and June 2010.

Both have pleaded not guilty. Regina and Ron Evans did not respond to several attempts to contact them for comment on this story.

Regina Evans' pretrial conference is set for Feb. 19 with the jury trial set for March 5.

### We are our brother's employer

After getting the grant money, the Evans-



**We Are Our Brother's Keeper** secured a grant to restore the New Regal Theater on Chicago's South Side, money that federal investigators say was misappropriated. | FILE PHOTO

es paid themselves \$12,000 a month in rent and went on a hiring spree, records show.

Among those hired:

- Regina's brother Ricky McCoy. Evans told the state she would train about 40 women and minorities for bricklaying and electrical careers, with help also available for completing GEDs. She didn't tell them that McCoy would be in charge of running the programs and finding jobs for the trainees.

Between January and early March 2010, state officials repeatedly asked Evans to explain \$96,000 in unauthorized rent payments to herself and her husband from the grant and the hiring of McCoy, records show.

Evans defended his hiring, writing, "He is very qualified and does an admirable job for the program and the people we serve."

- Ex-cop Charlton McKay, who had served in the Calumet District of Chicago, where Ronald Evans' father was a commander. At the time of his hire, McKay was on parole after being convicted of reckless homicide, leaving the scene of an accident and filing a false police report stemming from a 2005 crash in which a 15-year-old pedestrian was killed. McKay was supposed to handle

community development and oversee the students' construction sites, according to Regina Evans' grant application. McKay did not respond to multiple messages left at his home.

- At least two employees said they worked only for Regina Evans' private company that bought and ran the theater, The Prime Time Group, and not for We Are Our Brother's Keeper.

One of them was Jeri Wright, the daughter of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright — President Barack Obama's former pastor. She described herself as "close to Regina Evans as a blood relative" and told the SouthtownStar the work she did for Evans wasn't for the foundation, although state records show she was paid about \$16,000 from the grant money.

She said she did contract work to set up field trips to construction sites and bring in speakers.

"I didn't know anything about the inner workings of how she received the money, nothing about the grant money, nothing at all," Jeri Wright said.

Wright said she handled "things that concerned construction companies" but

declined to provide details.

"I don't want to add any stress to her life," Wright said. "I'm praying that her family's health stays intact as all of this is unfolding."

Robert Stampas, listed in grant documents as a contracted web developer and photographer, told a similar story.

"I worked for the Regal Theater, I didn't work for the foundation," Stampas said. "When the Regal went under, that's when our relationship went under."

"There's nothing else I'd like to say," he said. "She (Regina) is in enough trouble."

The Evanses declared bankruptcy on the Prime Time Group in late 2010. When the New Regal venture failed, the historic building, 1641 E. 79th St., went into foreclosure. It was sold at auction in September to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

In July, a Cook County judge ordered that We Are Our Brother's Keeper repay the state \$917,194 in misspent grant funds.

### New jobs in CCH

Both Evanses had lucrative jobs in Country Club Hills, Regina as police chief, Ronald as the inspector general tasked with investigating her department.



# COP'S PALS

The city eliminated Ronald Evans' job in August 2011, shortly before his wife's October firing. They had combined salaries of more than \$200,000 while employed by Country Club Hills, but they filed for bankruptcy in March.

In Ronald Evans' 16 months on the job, he completed four of 12 investigations, ruling that two complaints were "unfounded" and he could not prove the other two, according to documents obtained by the Southtown-Star.

While Regina ran the police department, her hires there, according to a Southtown-Star analysis, included:

- McCoy, her brother, who was hired to do tech work for the city.

- Sheila Watson, who was supposed to be a teacher in the Evanses' theater program, and became Regina's secretary at the police station.

- Accountant Michael Simmons, who did some bookkeeping for We Are Our Brothers Keeper and landed a job at a police department-run Country Club Hills summer camp where the kids, some with politically connected parents, were paid to attend. At the camp, Simmons worked alongside We Are Our Brother's Keeper board member Theresa Gibbs and taught a class in money management.

"I wanted to impart my expertise on some of the teenagers," Simmons said.

Simmons, who owns an accounting firm in Country Club Hills, told the Southtown-Star he never did any accounting work for We Are Our Brother's Keeper and he wasn't given any quarterly reports to fill out. Instead Ronald Evans filed them, documents show.

"Once I saw that, I said, 'I'm taking myself out of this,'" Simmons said. "I knew something wasn't right with how they were handling the funds. Once I removed myself from that, I let myself go and moved on to something else."

- Ashley Simon, who was going to be a mentor to trainees at the theater, landed a spot in a controversial part-time police officer program in Country Club Hills — even though she had no experience and once had her driver's license suspended due to unpaid traffic tickets. She's since been hired full time on the police force.

- Evans used the same part-time police officer program — funded in May 2010 through a \$263,900 federal grant — to hire others associated with We Are Our Brother's Keeper.

A Markham resident claimed that one of those officers, Tiffany Burrell, of Chicago,



Regina Evans | FILE PHOTO

persuaded him and his wife to provide a \$75,000, 30-day loan to Regina Evans in 2006 to help Burrell open a pizzeria at the New Regal Theater. The resident claimed the money was transferred to an account number that Burrell provided that turned out to be Evans' account.

- The daughter of the state employee who was supposed to oversee the grant also got a job as a part-time cop. Guiveda Francois was given a badge and a gun after training despite having no police experience and having once lost her driver's license after a crash for having no insurance.

She is named in an excessive force lawsuit alleging she conspired with another officer to falsely charge a man shot by the other officer. She since has left the department.

Guiveda's mother, Deveda Francois, administered Evans' grant until she was fired in February 2011, accused by the state of pressuring grant recipients to make specific hires, sharing confidential information and using her state computer to do work for her own charity, Diamonds in the Ruff.

An arbitrator ordered Francois to be rehired after she sued. She works for the department in a different role.

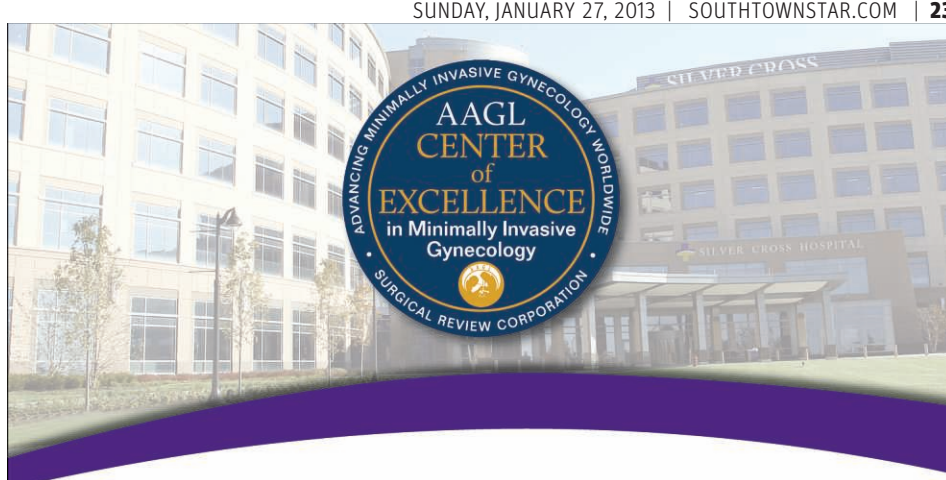
Country Club Hills' part-time police program was discontinued in October 2011.

- Accountant Anthony J. Stoll said he worked for Diamonds in the Ruff and Francois introduced him to Regina Evans, who tapped him to work at We Are Our Brother's Keeper. He worked there about six months and left because he claimed Evans owed him about \$4,500 and refused to sign him to a contract.

Stoll said Evans showed him payroll records and brochures for the nonprofit, but he never saw it operating.

"The only I thing I ever questioned was if the program ever existed," Stoll said.

Contributing: Lauren Fitzpatrick, Dave McKinney



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