

CONTRACTOR: 'ALL A

\$103K in purchases never may have made it to Riverdale marina

THE PURCHASES

Orland Park contractor Jessie Williams signed off on several Home Depot purchases he claimed were for redeveloping the Riverdale marina. These include:

- A Jan. 4 purchase of 14 boxes of siding totalling \$1,333.92 shipped to 219 S. 14th Ave., Maywood
- A Jan. 14 purchase of a \$189 three-in-one flooring nailer and stapler, and a \$18.97 double sided soft face hammer
- A Jan. 23 purchase of a \$235 36-inch-by-80-inch medium oak seven-panel brass center arch fiberglass door
- A Jan. 24 purchase of a \$99 Bootz Industries Aloha five-foot bath tub
- A Jan. 26 purchase of a \$599 self-cleaning freestanding gas oven and a \$1,000 refrigerator shipped to 14733 Seeley Ave., Harvey
- A Jan. 26 purchase of two 60-inch vanity ashburn mahogany vanity cabinets totalling \$1,362
- A Feb. 9 purchase of a \$299 clothes washer, a \$299 clothes dryer, a \$399 electric stove, and a \$547 refrigerator
- A Feb. 13 purchase of a \$1.48 bottle of soda pop, a \$7.47 flat cut all paint brush
- A Feb. 13 purchase of three Vitamin Water drinks at \$1.64 each.
- A Feb. 13 purchase of a \$275 rotary hammer
- A Feb. 13 purchase of a \$399 electric range oven, a \$299 electric dryer, a \$547 freezer and refrigerator, five copper double kitchen sinks at \$499 each, four polished chrome faucets at \$389 each, and four 75 gallon water heaters at \$845 each
- A Feb. 14 purchase of a \$208 40-gallon water heater
- A Feb. 14 purchase of a \$189 flooring nailer and stapler, a \$18.97 double sided soft face hammer
- A Feb. 15 purchase of a \$399 drop-in bathtub with therapeutic massage jets
- A Feb. 22 purchase of a \$549 gas range stove, a \$547 refrigerator shipped to 16 E. 137th St., Riverdale
- A March 5 purchase of two toilets totalling \$126.84 shipped to 13737 Illinois St., Riverdale

BY CASEY TONER

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Restoring the blighted Riverdale marina, the jewel of the Little Calumet River, would take leadership, a multimillion-dollar investment and scores of talented, trustworthy contractors.

So the marina's managing partner — a felon who wore a wire in the federal inquiry into Tony Rezko — hired construction companies owned by Jessie Williams, an Orland Park felon who has been sued successfully for fraud and was once convicted of dealing drugs.

A SouthtownStar analysis of records shows that more than \$13,000 in Home Depot merchandise that Williams claimed was for the marina was shipped to houses in Maywood, Harvey and Riverdale. It's uncertain whether those purchases made it to the marina.

The goods included power tools, a bathtub with massage jets, residential gas and electric stoves, refrigerators, a washer and dryer and several water heaters. In one case, more than \$1,000 in appliances were shipped to a Riverdale rental home owned by Williams' brother, Lonnell Williams, who's also a felon.

But that's not all. Thousands of dollars worth of appliances were shipped this winter to a house where Lonnell Williams lives.

All told, purchases from Home Depot and Menards and payments to Jessie Williams and his companies account for about half of the \$647,000 in charges that a village-ordered review of the marina company's books have called into question.

"It was all a big mistake," Jessie Williams said before declining further comment.

The SouthtownStar reported last month that village officials gave \$900,000 in taxpayer funds to Nosmo Kings, the company that owns the marina and promised to redevelop it. The money was paid out of a special taxing district used to restore blighted property.

Saying that the money was not properly accounted for, the village tapped an accounting firm — Mulcahy, Pauritsch, Salvador and Co. — to review the company's books. The report was presented to the village board in closed session during Tuesday's board meeting.

The report found that Nosmo Kings sub-



Boat slips stand at the Riverdale marina. | JOSEPH P. MEIER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

mitted about \$1.8 million in project-related expenses — about \$1.2 million short of what the company had agreed to spend on the marina to receive any taxpayer money at all.

About \$647,000 of the submitted expenses were ineligible for reimbursement, lacked supporting documentation or were not specifically associated with the project, the report found. These included about \$103,000 in Menards and the Home Depot bills and \$246,000 in payments to Jessie Williams and his two companies, the report shows.

Attached to the report was a letter Nosmo Kings' attorney Theodore Netzky wrote, offering a deal to the village. In lieu of a lawsuit, Riverdale could record a \$900,000 mortgage against the property.

The debt would be erased if Nosmo Kings paid the village \$300,000 in four months or \$450,000 by the year's end, Netzky wrote. Otherwise Nosmo Kings would have to pay Riverdale all of the money within three years. It would be an incentive for the marina's managing partner, John Thomas, to sell the property, Netzky wrote.

Village attorney Mark Sterk suggested that the village should get the mortgage on the property first and seek a greater and quicker payoff. With or without a lawsuit, Sterk couldn't guarantee whether Riverdale would get its money back.

"This was supposed to be an opportunity," Riverdale Trustee Tanya Watkins

said about the project. "And it turned out to be a mess."

John Thomas, the marina's managing partner, wrote in an email to the SouthtownStar that he hired Jessie Williams' company, among others, following the recommendation of Riverdale Mayor Deyon Dean.

"The mayor referred us to several qualified African American contractors, and I selected Orland Park Construction and their affiliates," Thomas wrote.

Dean shrugged off Thomas' claims. "Whatever companies went out there, that was on him," Dean said.

But records show the village paid companies belonging to the Williamses more than \$300,000 in 2011 for painting, landscaping, construction and demolition work.

Dean signed many of the invoices, including a May 2011 bill from Orland Park Construction for demolition of three homes that lists \$14,900 in asbestos removal charges. A Cook County grant paid for the bill.

An Illinois Environmental Protection Agency spokeswoman said her organization was not notified of the removal as required by federal law. Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan has a lawsuit pending against Jessie Williams and others for improperly removing asbestos during the demolition of Harvey's Dixie Square Mall in 2005.

Despite his legal woes, two of Jessie Williams' businesses were tapped to work at the marina — SouthTown Construction in Harvey and Orland Park Construction.

BIG MISTAKE'

Orland Park Construction received its first check from Nosmo Kings for \$75,000 in January. Jessie Williams signed a sworn statement two months later, claiming that the Home Depot and Menards invoices totalling more than \$175,000 were for items used exclusively for the marina and its restaurant.

The statement was issued and later presented to the village days after Sterk wrote a memo recommending that no further payments be made to Nosmo Kings due in part to the questionable Home Depot expenses.

Records show that about \$13,100 of Home Depot merchandise was shipped to renter-occupied houses at 219 S. 14th Ave., Maywood; 16 E. 137th St., Riverdale; 13737 Illinois St., Riverdale; and another house at 14733 Seeley Ave., Harvey.

Lonnell Williams owns the Riverdale rental home on East 137th Street, where a \$549 gas range stove and a \$547 refrigerator were shipped to in February.

Asked about the shipments, Lonnell Williams said: "It's Jessie's business and I let him run everything. I don't want to be bothered by it."

Lonnell Williams, convicted of reckless discharge of a weapon, a felony, in September 2011, is living at the Harvey house on Seeley Avenue, which recently had an addition put onto it, he said. He also said

Jessie Williams owns the house.

Jessie Williams was convicted of selling a controlled substance in 1993 and unlawful use of a weapon in 2008, both felonies.

The Seeley Avenue house is where about \$5,590 worth of Home Depot merchandise was delivered in January and February.

"I don't know anything about that," Lonnell Williams said.

More than \$4,500 worth of goods, including two toilets, was also shipped in March to the house at 13737 Illinois St., Riverdale. A tenant at the house who refused to give his name said he has written his rent checks to Jessie Williams for the past two months.

Most of the Home Depot invoices list a house belonging to Woodbridge Homes, an assisted-living center in Harvey, as the buyer's address. Two of the invoices list the buyer as Woodbridge Homes owner Aundrain Witcher.

Witcher said she didn't know Jessie Williams or anything about the Riverdale marina.

"My business is Woodbridge Homes and how they got my address, I don't know," Witcher said. "Whoever did this is a crook, I'll tell you that."



Thomas

Brushes with the law

An Orland Park contractor at the center of the Riverdale marina development has a lengthy history of lawsuits and brushes with the law.

Jessie Williams, 52, is a defendant in a lawsuit Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed in 2005 for his role in the demolition of Harvey's Dixie Square Mall. The lawsuit alleges that Williams' former company, Windy Windy City Construction, improperly removed asbestos from the site.

Williams also pleaded guilty to felony unlawful use of a weapon in June 2008 after being pulled over in March 2007 at Illinois 394 and U.S. 30, according to court records.

When police searched his car, they found 11 grams of marijuana, a 9 mm pistol loaded with eight hollow-point bullets in the magazine, and \$48,597 in cash, court records show. He claimed the money was for the construction of a shopping center at 186th Street and Cicero Avenue in Country Club Hills and police returned the cash to him.

But carrying the handgun was an automatic felony under Illinois law as he was convicted in 1993 of felony delivery a controlled substance.

The owner of the Country Club Hills shopping center site filed a lawsuit against Williams in October 2009 seeking more than \$350,000, court records show.

Tinley Park resident Zenah Taylor alleges Williams kept a \$150,000 deposit for construction work at the Country Club Hills site although it was never completed, according to the lawsuit. She also claimed in the lawsuit that Williams failed to complete brickwork, plumbing, sewer and other construction at a separate site at 3355 W. 183rd St. in Homewood, despite taking \$200,000.

A Cook County judge ruled against Williams and ordered him to pay \$106,500 in January 2010 in a fraud and breach of contract lawsuit. The lawsuit said that Wil-

liams entered into a contract with Marcus Perkerson in 1995 to take care of a property at 15339 Center Ave., Harvey.

Williams agreed to pay Perkerson \$1,000 a month every month, but only paid him \$13,500 total, leaving an unpaid bill of \$106,500 according to the lawsuit. The lawsuit says Williams misidentified himself as the owner of Windy City Construction, instead of the owner of Windy Windy City Construction, which he owned.

Williams didn't pay taxes on the property, maintain it, and he never listed Perkerson as the insurance beneficiary, the lawsuit said. The property was demolished due to negligence, according to the lawsuit. Multiple contempt of court arrest warrants for Williams were issued during the lawsuit because Williams didn't show up to court.

In January 2012, a judge ordered Williams to pay \$89,115 to a woman who fell down an unlit stairway in a building he owns at 192 E. 154th St., Harvey. The lawsuit claimed Williams negligently failed to keep the interior stairway of the building lit after dark.

Williams was also ordered to pay Nicor Gas \$8,778.73 in 2009 after skipping out on paying bills dating back to 2004 on a property in the 100 block of East 194th Street in Harvey, court records show.

Additionally, Williams was ordered to pay \$9,900 to a Chicago currency exchange in August 2009 after a check he wrote was cashed there but his bank refused to pay the business the money.

Liquor distributor Southern Wine and Spirits won a judgment against Williams in May 2010, when a judge ruled he had to pay the company \$6,377 for liquor that was shipped to his former business. The orders, which were never paid, were made between August 2008 and September 2008 and sent to J's Food and Liquor, 15340 Dixie Highway, Harvey.

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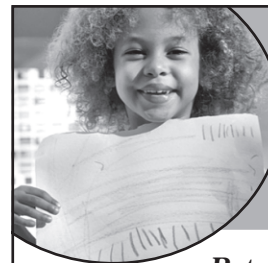
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