

Company pleads guilty to worker underpayment

An El Cajon construction company pleaded guilty Monday to underpaying workers on a federally funded housing project, and was barred from working on government projects for the next three years.

The guilty plea came from attorney Peter Hughes, who represented United Constructors of 702 Carlow Way, which is owned by Cartell Construction Inc.

The firm's president, Armando Doblado of Spring Valley, authorized the guilty plea, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Eve Bermingham.

U.S. District Court Judge Leland Nielsen fined the firm \$2,500, suspended an additional \$7,500 fine and ordered the firm to repay its workers, under the conditions of three years' probation.

United Constructors was accused of underpaying 18 employees \$24,940 to work on the Golden Age Public Housing Project in San Diego in July 1982. The firm was one of nine other companies in the county charged with violations of the Davis-Bacon Act on Feb. 4.

"They had never been on a federal contract before," Hughes told the judge.

The Davis-Bacon Act mandates that federally funded project workers be paid the "prevailing wages" of the local community.

"The prevailing wage was translated into piecework. It would have been almost the prevailing wage," Hughes said. "There was no exploitation of the people doing the work. There weren't any kickbacks."

Bermingham said afterwards only the firm itself was

charged and not its executives because the project was its first federal project and thus officials were inexperienced in determining the wages. She said this was not an aggravated case.

United Constructors worked on a low-income housing project for the elderly.

Two executives from other East County firms similarly charged pleaded guilty last month.

Glenn Thomas, president of Thomas Electric in El Cajon, pleaded guilty to making a false report to the Housing and Urban Development Department regarding \$21,411 in underpayments to 10 employees on a federal housing project.

Ramon Aguilar, a partner in Hacienda Landscape in Lemon Grove, pleaded guilty to making a false

statement to the U.S. Department of Labor regarding underpayments of \$137,577 to 86 workers on freeway contracts on Interstate 8 in El Cajon and Interstate 15 near Poway.

Thomas and Aguilar will be sentenced on April 1 and April 22.

Owners of Meredith-Worley Inc. of Vista will be sentenced May 6 for underpayments to 86 workers on Camp Pendleton painting projects.

Baker Electrician of San Diego and former owner William Baker was fined \$1,000 last month and ordered to make restitution to three employees allegedly cheated out of \$18,760 on a Clairemont low-income housing project. The firm was also barred from future government work for three years.

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