

HOMESTEAD

Police: Bogus engineer now held for \$33M fraud

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Miami-Dade County Corrections

Janet LeGrand, who police say was the driving force behind a fake engineering firm that tried to dupe Homestead into awarding her the city's most recent downtown project, has been arrested and booked into the Miami-Dade County jail.

A woman who police say used her fake engineering firm to try to dupe Homestead into giving her a \$33.3 million construction contract was arrested Wednesday and booked into Miami-Dade County jail.

Janet LeGrand, who “methodically created an elaborate facade to make the Bleu Network Inc. appear to be a large, reputable company,” was arrested on a charge of organized scheme to defraud, according to the arrest warrant. She is being held on \$50,000 bond.

LeGrand, 47, was a bidder for Homestead Station, a project aimed at reviving the city's ghostly urban core and that will include an upscale movie theater, a bowling alley, shops, restaurants, a parking garage and a transit center. Le-Grand lost the bid after she was ranked third out of three proposals. The winning bidder was awarded \$33.3 million in public funding for the project. LeGrand later filed a protest and a lawsuit against the city, saying the bid wasn't done fairly. They have not been resolved.

LeGrand's company website depicts multiple construction projects, implying that the Bleu Network built several structures, tunnels, bridges and high-speed rail systems around the world.

But all were lies, investigators say. The

businesswoman falsely portrayed herself as a licensed civil engineer, lied about graduating from the University of Miami with a bachelor's degree in engineering, and about having offices in Spain, Argentina and Brickell, police said.

Also untrue, police said: that the Bleu Network was a financial partner in the \$942 million Port of Miami Tunnel project and in a \$483 million development project in Ohio. Police say LeGrand also failed to disclose eight civil lawsuits and 15 wage complaints filed against her. She is also accused of forging a fictitious letter from a bank and listing fake references. Twenty years ago, she was arrested for issuing bad checks, then rearrested for violating probation by issuing more.



Bleu Network Inc.

“Hopefully, this arrest will send a clear message to anyone who mistakenly thinks that they can get away with taking advantage of the city of Homestead,” said Zackery Good, Homestead’s spokesman.

Homestead’s central business district has been depressed so long that few people remember when it wasn’t a gritty eyesore. But a revival has been under way, primed by a new city hall, a new police station and the restoration — after 40 years of decay — of the iconic Seminole Theater.

Late last year, city leaders sketched out the proposed centerpiece: a 10-screen movie palace, bowling center and retail complex with a 1,000-space parking garage and a location next to the South Dade busway — which links up with the Metrorail. Officials envisioned crowds forsaking nearby malls and flocking to Krome Avenue for a hot date or family fun.

Then the city’s hopes developed an unexpected snag. An alliance consisting of Steve Shiver, a Homestead mayor-turned-lobbyist; and LeGrand,

a businesswoman with a history of breach-of-contract lawsuits and unpaid wages, came up with a development plan for Florida City, just one mile to the south. Its components: a movie palace, retail complex and bowling center, including a 1,000-plus space parking garage.

LeGrand’s Bleu Network said it had access to billions of dollars in investment capital. But the county has fielded a series of complaints from former Bleu employees who say they were not paid their wages and moving expenses. Among those who have complained: Lynda Bell, a former mayor of Homestead, who briefly worked as the Bleu Network’s “chief strategy officer,” who says she was owed \$9,166.63.

City calendars show that after LeGrand lost the Homestead bid, she met with Shiver — who is not registered as a lobbyist but lobbied for this project — and Florida City Mayor Otis Wallace. Three weeks later, the Bleu Network submitted an identical proposal to Florida City and a bid was advertised.

After learning that Le-Grand had filed a proposal in Florida City for essentially the same project, the city of Homestead asked for an injunction to stop action on the Florida City plan, calling Bleu’s actions “immoral, unethical, oppressive and unscrupulous,” and saying the only purpose of the Florida City proposal was to discourage the winning company in Homestead.

The Bleu Network fired back, saying the Florida City project had nothing to do with Homestead and calling the motion a “baseless attempt” to bully Bleu away from Florida City.

At a public meeting earlier this year, Florida City Mayor Otis Wallace said the two projects were unrelated and that there was no reason both cities couldn’t both build bowling lanes and movie theaters.

But on Monday, Wallace told the Miami Herald the project never made it to the council because “I believe it duplicated things we already have. I didn’t think it would succeed.”

“Why have a movie theater and bowling alley in Florida City and in Homestead? All they would end up doing is hurt each other.”

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