

Local News

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Convicted Felon Linked To Firm That Won Billboard Rights From Des Plaines

By TODD WESSELL

Journal Editor

New documents obtained by the Journal this week show that convicted felon James Dvorak had a strong connection to Premere Outdoor, Inc., as late as December of last year.

Premere Outdoor's Annual Report filed with the Illinois Secretary of State's office on Dec. 10, 2003 shows that Dvorak, former Cook County undersheriff who spent time in prison during the 1980s for bribery and income tax evasion, served as the company's vice president and treasurer as of that date. Listed as president and secretary of the company is Joseph J. Loss, a Lombard attorney who was the point man of the company in its efforts to land the rights to build 10 billboards in Des Plaines. Named as directors of Premere Outdoor are Heather Loss, Maryann Dvorak and Leonara Nicosia, believed to be the wives of Joseph Loss, James Dvorak, and Joseph P. Nicosia, Jr. an Oak Park businessman who is awaiting sentencing in an insurance fraud scheme.

Secretary of state records obtained by the Journal two weeks ago listed Nicosia as president of Premere Outdoor, Inc. apparently up to Dec. 10, 2003. On that date, documents filed with the state at that time show Loss as president and secretary and Dvorak vice president and treasurer. A plea agreement in Nicosia's financial fraud case was filed in U.S. District Court on Dec. 18, 2003.

Confusion over who manages and owns Premere Outdoor recently triggered an investigation by Des Plaines officials after learning that billboard giant, Lamar Advertising, had purchased Premere's assets. Included in those assets, the city was told, is Premere's ability to build up to 10 billboards in Des Plaines along the Northwest Tollway. Billboards along tollways near O'Hare Airport can fetch as much as \$12,000 per month for one of two sides.

At a recent meeting of the city's License & Judicial Committee, members decided not to issue any more permits to erect billboards in Des Plaines along local tollways until questions about Premere can be answered. Specifically, aldermen directed Wiltse to investigate Premere's transfer or sale of billboard rights to Lamar and possibly billboard giant Viacom. At that meeting, City Wiltse said he was unsure if Premere sold Lamar or Viacom the rights to erect and maintain any of the 10 billboards which the city granted in 2003. It is now believed that the city has received applications from Premere or Premere/Lamar to erect five billboards. Apparently three signs have been built, one at Touhy and River roads, the other two near Mt. Prospect Road. Wiltse said this week that it is the city's position that Premere cannot sell to another company its right to erect billboards.

Confusion over the possible sale of billboard rights and the revelation for the third time this year that Dvorak has a business connection to Des Plaines prompted committee chairman Ald. Don Smith (7th) two weeks ago to call for an investigation. Wiltse said he will have a report to aldermen in October.

Dvorak's named first surfaced in Des Plaines around April of this year when it was revealed that he was an employee of a real estate marketing firm hired by the city to develop property at Mannheim and Higgins roads. Later it was learned that Dvorak brought the Rolling Meadows-based marketing firm and Des Plaines together in August of 2000 when the city launched efforts at redeveloping the Fisherman's Dude Ranch property on Golf Road. At that time and up to July of last year, Bill Schneider, a close friend of Dvorak's, served as the city's acting

city manager, Economic Development director, and director of the Community Development Dept. which monitors redevelopment projects, land use matters and building inspections.

Wiltse said Monday that documents his office recently obtained show that Dvorak "had a stock interest in Premere Outdoor." Those documents were supplied to the city by Lamar only after Assistant City Attorney Ray Bartel in July demanded from Lamar documents that showed Lamar's purchase of Premere's assets.

Loss, in a Sept. 1, 2004 letter to Wiltse informed the city attorney that Lamar had "inadvertently forwarded to you documents which are the subject of a confidentiality agreement between Premere Media, Inc. and Lamar Outdoor Advertising." Loss instructs Wiltse to return the documents to Lamar adding, "any use of these documents in a public forum will trigger an immediate and significant response by the shareholders of Premere Media, Inc."

Wiltse told the Journal Monday that despite Loss's insistence, he will not return the documentation.

"I don't feel I have to," Wiltse said.

Repeated attempts by the Journal to contact Loss, Dvorak and Nicosia during the last several weeks have been unsuccessful.

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