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Billboard Players Now In Deerfield

Off The Record

By TODD WESSELL

The sweet aroma of large sums of money has led a few names familiar to residents of Des Plaines to the North suburban village of Deerfield.

Not only are some of the players familiar but so is the subject: billboards.

Deerfield trustees recently approved an ordinance that permits the building of three large outdoor signs on 25 acres of village-owned property along the Edens Expressway Spur (I-94) near Lake-Cook Road. In exchange, the village will reap a windfall of \$33,000 per year per billboard, along with other smaller fees and 28% of the net advertising revenues received by the billboard company. It appears to be a much more profitable deal for Deerfield than what Des Plaines engineered four years ago when it granted to a billboard company the rights to erect between 10 and 15 outdoor signs along local expressways for a much smaller amount. Des Plaines' action provoked outrage not only because it practically gave away the billboard rights, but because of the involvement of certain individuals and the fact that the rights to erect the signs were eventually sold to giant billboard companies for millions of dollars without the city's prior knowledge.

The existence of billboards, especially along expressways and near airports in major metropolitan areas, can fetch the owners huge sums of revenue. There's nothing wrong with it. Advertising is a service most people appreciate and use. As long as state and local regulations are met concerning size, height and distance from other billboards, the practice is common throughout the country.

The company that obtained permission from Deerfield to build the three billboards is Zebra Outdoor, Inc. whose top officers are Ross and Jeremy Mash of Chicago. Their lawyer is Joseph Loss, the managing partner of the law firm Loss & Pavone. Mr. Loss was very involved in securing the billboard rights in Des Plaines approximately three years ago for a company called Premere Outdoor, Inc.

In a document recently handed over to Deerfield, it lists the owners and beneficiaries having an interest in the billboard contract. On that

list are the names of Ross and Jeremy Mash, Heather Loss of Lisle, Joseph P. Nicosia III of Chicago, Leonora Nicosia of Oakbrook, and two companies: Outdoor Business Ventures of Lincolnwood and Millennium Media, Inc. of Lombard. In addition, listed as having control of Millennium Media are Heather Loss and Leonora Nicosia.

Heather Loss is believed to be the wife of Joseph Loss. The Nicosias appear to be related to Oak Brook businessman Joseph Nicosia who was convicted several years ago in an insurance fraud scheme.

In 2004, the Journal & Topics Newspapers reported that the stockholders of Premere Outdoor, the company that obtained billboard rights from Des Plaines, had sold their interest in the company to a major outdoor sign company. The Premere stockholders listed in the sale agreement were Leonora Nicosia, Heather Ross, and James Dvorak, a convicted felon who had served for many years as Cook County undersheriff. There is no evidence that we know of that Dvorak is involved in the Deerfield agreement or any other billboard transaction.

In 2004 and 2005, we published 60 separate articles on the Des Plaines billboard issue. While the subject received extreme scrutiny and was a fascinating subject, new billboards have sprung up in Des Plaines along the Northwest and Tri-State tollways. And now, with modern technology paving the way, digital billboards that have the capability of displaying multiple messages during an hour's time appear to be heading our way.

Several attempts to contact Jeremy or Ross Mash and Deerfield Mayor Steven Harris this week were unsuccessful.

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