

**HOUSTON**

# New lawsuit in comic book case

## Company sues DA over jailed ex-investigators

By **Mike Glenn** | December 22, 2014 | Updated: December 22, 2014 7:30pm

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An industrial crane company is suing the Harris County District Attorney's Office over a cache of expensive comic books that have resulted in criminal charges against a pair of veteran investigators.

Houston-based Tadano American Corp. accused the DA's office of failing to properly supervise former investigators Lonnie Blevins, 39, and Dustin Deutsch, 41.

They were accused of pilfering thousands of dollars worth of vintage comic books seized in an embezzlement case against a former Tadano Corp. employee and later selling them to a dealer in Chicago.

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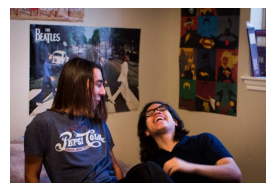
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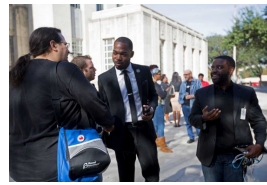


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In May, Blevins pleaded guilty following an FBI investigation into the theft. A Harris County grand jury indicted Deutsch last month for felony theft by a public servant and evidence tampering.



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On Monday, officials with the DA's office were not available to comment about the lawsuit.

The case that landed both former lawmen in jail and triggered the lawsuit began in May 2012 when they were assigned to investigate attorney Anthony Chiofalo, who embezzled about \$9 million from his client, Tadano America Corp.

He bought sports memorabilia like a batter's helmet signed by Pete Rose, baseball cards, and rare comic books such as a first-edition "Batman" worth about \$900,000. Chiofalo later pleaded guilty to felony theft and was sentenced to 40 years in prison.

The DA's office leased seven large office storage units in Spring to safeguard the personal property seized from Chiofalo's home that was bought with the stolen funds. During the investigation, Deutsch had the keys to them.

"He controlled the access," said Jim Mount, a special prosecutor assigned to the case.

In their lawsuit filed Dec. 18, the company said the DA's office "failed to adequately supervise their employees in carrying out the inventory process, securing the storage units, making a detailed inventory of the contents or establishing procedures/internal controls to adequately safeguard the personal property."

In late 2012, Blevins sold about \$140,000 in comics to a dealer in Chicago for about half of what they were worth. He showed the suspicious buyer his badge and allowed him to make a photo-copy of his driver's license.

The dealer recognized some of the comics as the same items Chiofalo purchased from an online auction house.

The lawsuit took note of the DA's decision in February to freeze 125 criminal cases after the probe cast doubt into the credibility of the former investigators.

"The DA's action is further acknowledgement of its actual notice of the negligence, misconduct and claims asserted in this petition," the lawsuit states.

The company is seeking undetermined damages because of what it alleges is the DA's "breaches of fiduciary duties" and "negligent supervision of employees." It also wants the DA's office to pay its attorney fees.

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