

Former DA investigator pleads guilty to theft

By Brian Rogers | May 16, 2014 | Updated: May 16, 2014 8:12pm

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Photo By Julio Cortez/Staff

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Lonnie Blevins, senior investigator for the Harris County Fire Marshal's Office, releases information about Sharon Watkins, seen in a mug shot, left, and a driver license photo, as the Fire Marshal's Office talked on Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2008, in Houston, about the Harris County grand jury indictment of Watkins and her husband, David Watkins, for a 2003 house fire in northwest Harris County that killed Shanda Watkins, 8, and Raymond Farley, 16. (Julio Cortez / Chronicle)



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Ex-investigator accused of stealing valuable comic books

Friday.

Lonnie Blevins, 39, admitted in federal court that he took more than \$5,000 worth of stolen goods that he sold at a comic book convention in Chicago.

He faces a maximum of 10 years in prison for the interstate transport of stolen goods when he is sentenced by U.S. District Judge **Melinda Harmon** on Aug. 1 after a pre-

sentence investigation.

His attorney, **Dick DeGuerin**, said he is hopeful that Blevins may get probation instead of prison time since he cooperated with investigators.

Prosecutors told Harmon that Blevins had "cooperated substantially" with the ongoing investigation, causing some to wonder whether others may be charged in the scheme.

"It doesn't seem plausible that he acted alone," said **Philip Hilder**, an attorney for the company at the center of the case, Tadano America Corp. "It's very unsettling to think that other public servants may have been involved and have not been charged."

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The saga began when Tadano, which makes large cranes, hired attorney **Anthony Chiofalo**, who stole \$9 million from his employer beginning in 2010.

When Chiofalo, 52, was arrested in 2012, investigators, including Blevins, seized hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of rare comic books, collectibles and sports memorabilia believed to have been purchased with stolen money.

Hundreds of items, including a first-edition Batman comic book worth about \$900,000 and a baseball helmet signed by **Pete Rose**, were found in Chiofalo's home and storage units.

Chiofalo was sentenced earlier this month to 40 years in prison after pleading guilty to theft of more than \$200,000, a first-degree felony.

Blevins was arrested in February 2013, about two months after leaving the district attorney's office.

His partner at the office, **Dustin Deutsch**, was suspended after Blevins was arrested. Deutsch then resigned. He has not been charged with any crime.

Bryan Vaclavik, formerly a financial fraud consultant for Tadano, helped uncover the theft in 2012.

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