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Clear Lake deal drowns in sea of allegations of forgery, fraud

Democratic officeholders involved in mess

HOUSTON (AP) — Clear Lake area land deals involving some top state Democratic officeholders degenerated into a multimillion dollar mess amid allegations of forgery, fraud and misapplication of project funds, the *Houston Chronicle* reported Sunday.

The projects were among those put together by former state Rep. William J. Caraway and unsuccessful Houston mayoral candidate E.W. "Bill" Wright III and their partners. Both turned to real estate development in the wake of political losses.

Texas Land Commissioner Garry Mauro's business manager and a Clear Lake attorney claimed that Mauro and the lawyer never signed bank notes totaling \$5.5 million that bear their purported signatures and were used to fund the real estate ventures. A handwriting expert supported their claims.

Caraway and Wright, now the deputy director of the Democratic Party's presidential fund-raising effort, denied anyone other than the

investors had signed the notes. "Nobody would sign anybody's name for them," Wright said.

The developers, who packaged and sold tax shelter investments to a who's who of Democratic officeholders, including Mauro, Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby and U.S. Rep. Mike Andrews, have since seen their business fall apart.

Their company, Intertec Financial Group, has collapsed, plunging Wright and another partner into bankruptcy and causing embarrassment for a number of politicians who have lost money in the unsuccessful projects.

Allegations of fraud at Intertec have attracted the attention of the FBI and the Harris County District Attorney's Office. Their business dealings are the subject of a flurry of lawsuits, including one by a former partner who accuses the developers of misrepresenting their land deals and fraudulently mismanaging project monies.

Glimpses of their business dealings include:

— Caraway and Wright were directors at banks that made several million dollars in loans to their projects. After Wright was elected to the board of directors at Western Bank-Downtown, the bank made the \$850,000 loan that Mauro now disavows. "I never signed anything," Mauro said, referring further questions to his business manager and cousin, Don Mauro.

— The developers bought a 14.5-acre cow pasture for \$436,000 and then sold it ten weeks later for \$1.3 million to a partnership they formed. The loan that Mauro says he didn't sign financed \$850,000 of the transaction.

— Kenneth D. McConico, a Clear Lake area lawyer who was one of Caraway's first partners, said his name was forged on two mortgages totaling \$4 million for earlier projects.

A handwriting expert confirmed that McConico never signed the documents.

Caraway, Wright and another partner, David A. Frasier, defended

their business dealings, saying investors, including the Mayor, McConico, were well aware of involvement in the project. Wright said the signatures on the guarantees that Mauro and McConico now disavow, were collected by the banks involved, not by the developers.

The developers say that the same investors who now are trying to distance themselves from financially ailing land deals sent federal income tax returns and other correspondence that provided details about the project. They produced certified receipts that they said showed the investors were informed about the project.

The developers' attorney, Holland said that some of the disgruntled investors have filed other complaints to the state attorney general's office, the district attorney's office and the FBI. Nothing has come as a result.

Ex-Brazoria commissioner recollects his fulfilling history

WEST COLUMBIA (AP) — If variety is the spice of life, D.E. Grandstaff has had a flavorful one.

The 89-year-old has worked at a wide range of professions from coaching football to building oil rigs to raising cows to teaching school.

He has even been involved in politics and served as a Brazoria County commissioner for 10 years.

He spent most of his high school years in Louisiana where he had to ride nine miles every day on a horse or a mule to get to school.

"I alternated between the mule and the horse," he said. "It just depended on which one needed the rest. With the mule, I spent about half the time pulling it."

The summer of 1916 he worked for a company in Louisiana making \$3 a day.

"That's \$3 a day, honey, not an hour," he reiterated.

They had talked about getting married and he had written her father asking for permission.

The girl's father had told Grandstaff that it was okay with him but he would have to get his daughter's permission.

"I don't remember ever proposing," he said.

Olive's family was moving to West Columbia from Humble and it seemed like a long way to have to go to visit, he said.

"We asked him if he would marry us, but he said we'd have to wait till the meeting was over. It was about 11 when he was through. He asked us if we wanted to get married that month or the next. We told him that month, but he had to hurry to make it by midnight."

— D.E. Grandstaff

West Columbia the next morning to tell her family.

They were not upset, but were not quite sure what to think about the young couple.

"We lived in West Columbia because it set in raining," he said. "The roads were all dirt roads back then and we couldn't leave town."

The Grandstaffs lived in West Columbia off and on for nine years before moving there permanently in 1929.

He taught school and coached in West Columbia for four years before he was "voted out."

It was not his record that cost him his job, he contends, but petty politics.

The first year his football team only won one game and the next year was not much better, but in 1931 it won the county championship.

"None of the teams in our county even crossed my goal line," he said.

After working for the school, Grandstaff worked for area oil companies until World War II broke out.

He tried to re-enlist in the Marines but was told he would not be eligible for foreign service.

"I told them if I couldn't go with the rest of them, I'd just go on home and work in a defense plant," he said.

He worked at the Dow Chemical Co. until 1944, when he was elected county commissioner.

Grandstaff and his wife, Olive, had three children. His youngest daughter, Kathryn, married Bing Crosby, but Grandstaff said the fact that his son-in-law was famous never affected him too much.

"He was a top-notch fellow as long as I knew him," Grandstaff said.

After the death of his first wife, Olive, Grandstaff married his second wife, Clair.

Most of his time now is spent hunting, fishing and watching ball-games.

Recently he took a hunting and fishing trip to British Columbia where he hoped to kill a grizzly bear but did not.

"We caught some pretty big trout, though," he said. "Dolly Varden trout. That's Varden not Par-ton. They weigh 15, 17, 20 pounds. They're big fish."

Dallas Ballet offers merger to Fort Worth

DALLAS (AP) — The troubled Dallas Ballet has offered to merge with its Fort Worth counterpart to create a new regional company, a spokesman for the Dallas group said.

"I believe firmly that, together, Dallas and Fort Worth could create a ballet company that would be of major importance," Jay Vogelson, a spokesman for trustees of the financially troubled Dallas Ballet said.

"The Fort Worth Ballet has done some great things artistically," Vogelson said. "But the two of us there is an audience that could support a ballet company of that scale."

Serious financial problems plagued the Dallas Ballet in recent months, threatening the troupe's existence. Several companies around the country in similar straits have merged in recent years, with varying degrees of success.

Merging the troupes would combine donors, create greater financial stability, Vogelson said.

A study of the Dallas Ballet's financial problems urged the troupe to ask its creditors to forgive its \$1.8 million debt and to give \$1 million immediately to help the opening of programs scheduled for February and March.

Vogelson said the company's existing debt would not be forgiven by the Fort Worth Ballet in the case of a merger.

"It's best to start out with a combined company that doesn't have the burdens of either company, but has the advantages and attractions of both," he said.

But merging the smaller financially stable Fort Worth company with the larger Dallas company would involve many accommodations, Vogelson said.

Officials of the Fort Worth Ballet did not immediately return telephone calls by the Associated Press on Sunday.

The artistic styles of the companies vary considerably. Fort Worth Ballet stages modern dance works, while Dallas is classical.

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