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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution Secures 18-Year Prison Sentence for Pool Company Owner Committing \$1 Million in Fraud



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution today secured an 18-year prison sentence for the owner of a pool company defrauding nearly 100 Florida homeowners. Ricardo Villarroel Duerto, owner of Villa Pavers and Pools, along with salespersons and a licensed general contractor, defrauded homeowners in excess of \$1 million. The Honorable Judge William S. Orth sentenced Villarroel on charges of racketeering and conspiracy to commit racketeering.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Building a pool is an expensive undertaking and some families may save for years to build their dream pool. This shady contractor took advantage of nearly 100 Florida homeowners, including seniors, trying to buy a pool—causing more than \$1 million in losses. Thanks to our Statewide Prosecutors, this contractor will serve a lengthy prison sentence for ripping off Floridians."

Villarroel targeted victims in Broward, Collier, Hendry, Hillsborough, Lake, Miami-Dade, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas and Seminole counties. Villarroel promoted low overall prices on pools, compared to market value, as a hook to gain business from eventual victims yet pocketed significant deposits without following through on installation.

According to the investigation, state law enforcement officials received complaints claiming Villa Pavers and Pools collected around 40% of the contracted price for the installation of pools to some of the victims yet did not complete the job. Some of the installations resulted in giant holes in the victims' backyards, while other projects never started after Villarroel took the deposit by simply cutting off communication with a victim.

Additionally, the investigation uncovered that Villarroel teamed with licensed general contractor Luis Alvarez of Conquer Builders, who aided and abetted Villa Pavers and Pools to defraud homeowners throughout the state. Alvarez sold the use of his general contractor license to Villa Pavers and Pools, an unlicensed contractor company, to present a contractor license to homeowners and obtain building permits.

Villarroel used the license repeatedly and hired two salespeople, Michael Borrego Fernandez and Laura Ballester Alpizar, gaining contract after contract to supercharge the scheme and acquire more business, leading to the excess in cash.

Alvarez, Borrego and Ballester are all in custody facing the same charges as Villarroel.

Alvarez pled guilty to both charges with a sentence pending. Borrego and Ballester are out on bond.

Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Rebecca Smith-Hameroff prosecuted the case.

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