



Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas

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Two Indicted for Defrauding International Union of Operating Engineers and Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee

HOUSTON – A Houston grand jury has indicted Ronald and Anita Witt for conspiracy and embezzlement of funds from Local 450 of the International Union of Operating Engineers and Local 450's apprenticeship school, United States Attorney José Angel Moreno announced today along with Roger Hilburn, regional director, Employee Benefits Security Administration, and Daniel B. Cherry, district director, Office of Labor Management Standards.

Local 450 represents more than 1000 members employed in the crane rigging and hoisting industry in Southern and Eastern Texas. Ronald Witt, 64, was Local 450's business manager. Ronald Witt's wife, Anita, 56, was Local 450's treasurer and the coordinator of Local 450's training facility - the Joint Apprenticeship Training Council (JATC).

The indictment alleges that between May 2007 and April 2009, Ronald and Anita Witt used Local 450 and JATC funds for unauthorized charges, including luxury trips for themselves and their friends, recreational travel trailers, purchases at hardware stores, personal meal expenses, rebuilding their Galveston home and depositing unearned union checks into their bank accounts. Each defendant is also charged with one count of conspiracy, nine counts of embezzlement from a union and five counts of embezzlement from an employee welfare benefit plan.

“These investigations are an example of our efforts to safeguard union democracy and ensure union financial integrity so that workers can have a more effective voice in the governance of their unions and a collective voice in the workplace,” said Cherry. “We hope this will encourage union members and others with knowledge of illegal practices to come forward and expose corrupt leadership to help us meet our goals.”

The 15-count indictment was returned under seal by a Houston grand jury on June 29, 2011, and unsealed July 8, 2011, following the arrest of Ronald and Anita Witt by deputies with the United States Marshals Service. They made an initial appearance on Friday before U.S. Magistrate Judge John Froeschner and were ordered released upon posting \$50,000 bond each. They are

next scheduled to appear in federal court in Galveston on Wednesday, July 13, 2011, before Judge Froeschner for arraignment.

Each count in the indictment carries a possible sentence of up to five years imprisonment, up to a \$250,000 fine, three years supervised release and full restitution.

The year-long investigation leading to these charges was prompted by a referral from the International Union of Operating Engineers, which took over Local 450 in April 2009. The investigation was conducted by Office of Labor Management Standards and the Employee Benefits Security Administration. Assistant U.S. Attorney F. Andino Reynal is prosecuting the case.

***An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence.
A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.***