

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
NORTHERN DISTRICT *of* INDIANA

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Northern District of Indiana

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Union Officials Plead Guilty To Violent Extortion

WASHINGTON – Two officials from the local Iron Workers union pleaded guilty today for their role in a brutal assault on a group of non-union ironworkers in Dyer, Indiana. The attack, which left multiple workers with serious injuries, was part of an effort to obtain a contract for the union to assist with the construction of the Plum Creek Christian Academy, a school affiliated with the Dyer Baptist Church.

Assistant Attorney General Brian A. Benczkowski of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Thomas L. Kirsch II of the Northern District of Indiana, Special Agent in Charge Irene Lindow, Chicago Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG) and Special Agent in Charge Grant Mendenhall of the FBI's Indianapolis Field Office made the announcement.

Thomas Williamson Sr., 68, and Jeffrey Veach, 56, pleaded guilty to one count of extortion conspiracy before U.S. Magistrate Judge John Martin of the Northern District of Indiana.

Veach is the current president of Local 395 of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers (Local 395), based in Portage, Indiana. Prior to his recent retirement, Williamson was a business agent for Local 395. Under federal law, following their guilty pleas, Veach will forfeit his position as president and both men will be barred from holding any union position for at least 13 years following the end of any prison sentences they may serve.

Pursuant to their plea agreements, Williamson and Veach admitted that on Jan. 7, 2016, they conspired to use actual and threatened violence to obtain contracts for Local 395 – a business contract from general contractor Lagestee-Mulder of Illinois, and/or a labor contract from D5 Iron Works (D5), also of Illinois. Prior to Jan. 7, 2016, the two defendants had learned that D5 was performing structural ironwork for the Dyer Baptist Church, which was located in Local 395's "territory." They also knew that D5 was not signed up to a labor contract with Local 395.

On the afternoon of Jan. 6, 2016, Williamson visited the church jobsite to talk to the foreman of the D5 crew and convince him to “sign up” with Local 395, or to stop work on the site. After being told to leave the site, Williamson went across the street to the church. Once inside, he confronted a youth pastor for the church and told him that it was “unethical” to use non-union labor for the construction site. Williamson offered to get “his guys” on the jobsite instead. The next morning, Williamson returned to the jobsite, this time accompanied by co-defendant Veach. The D5 foreman again refused to join the union and asked the two defendants to leave the site. Williamson became angry and grabbed the foreman’s jacket, calling him, among other things, a “scab bastard.” As they left the site, Williamson remarked to Veach that the two of them were going to have to “take things back to old school.”

The two defendants then gathered up about 10 rank-and-file members of Local 395 to return to the jobsite that afternoon. Once at the jobsite, the union members immediately attacked the D5 workers and beat them with fists and loose pieces of hardwood, kicking them while they were on the ground. As a result of the attack, one D5 worker sustained a broken jaw that required several surgeries and extended hospitalization.

The Department of Labor-Office of Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Dyer Police Department investigated the case. Trial Attorneys Alexander Gottfried and Robert Tully of the Criminal Division’s Organized Crime and Gang Section are prosecuting the case. Through its Labor Unit, the Organized Crime and Gang Section supports federal criminal prosecution in cases involving labor-management relations, internal union affairs, and the operation of employee pension and health care plans. Assistant Chief for Labor-Management Racketeering Gerald Toner provided invaluable assistance in the prosecution of this case.