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Former L.A. Firefighter Pleads No Contest in Real-Estate Scheme

By Robert J. Lopez

A former Los Angeles firefighter who also worked as a real estate broker pleaded no contest Monday to more than a dozen felony counts in connection with a real-estate fraud scheme, authorities said.

Brent Lamont Mathews, 43, pleaded no contest to six counts of forgery, three counts of recording a false or fraudulent instrument and four counts of grand theft, the Los Angeles County district attorney's office said. He also admitted two special allegations of taking more than \$500,000.

Mathew's girlfriend at the time, Joi Rochelle Smith, 34, was a notary public and part-time real estate broker who was also charged by authorities. In February, she pleaded no contest to one count of recording a false or fraudulent instrument, the district attorney said. Smith was sentenced to three years of formal probation and 52 days of community service.

Mathews allegedly put his name on the title of a Hacienda Heights property without the owner's knowledge or consent through a series of forgeries and false filings, prosecutors said. He also allegedly went on to defraud two investors after recruiting them as partners to "flip" the house, the district attorney's office said.

The two victims lost \$146,000 in the deal, prosecutors said

Mathews resigned from the Los Angeles Fire Department in December 2009 in lieu of discharge, according to the district attorney.