

Guilty plea in Thunder Valley Casino fraud case

By Denny Walsh and Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

High-flying developer Bart Wayne Volen pleaded guilty Thursday to three felonies in connection with a scheme that prosecutors say looted between \$17 million and \$19 million from the owners of Thunder Valley Casino near Lincoln.

Volen, 55, also agreed to pay restitution of at least \$17 million and to cooperate with federal prosecutors seeking convictions of two other men who are charged with helping him defraud the United Auburn Indian Community in an overbilling rip-off involving a massive construction project.

Wearing a white dress shirt and khaki slacks, the once boisterous Volen spoke in a hushed voice Thursday before Judge Troy L. Nunley in U.S. District Court in Sacramento as he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit mail fraud, wire fraud, money laundering and filing a false tax return.

The plea deal obligates the government to recommend a sentence of up to nine years in prison and a \$15,000 fine, but the final outcome likely will hinge on the extent of Volen's cooperation against his co-defendants – former tribal administrator Greg Baker of Newcastle and construction project manager Darrell Hinz of Cameron Park.

Read the whole story