

Manjeet Bawa, sixth suspect in Long Island mortgage scheme, turns himself in

May 7, 2014 by ROBERT E. KESSLER / robert.kessler@newsday.com



A Dix Hills man surrendered to FBI agents Wednesday and was arraigned on a bank fraud charge in connection with a \$30 million scheme to illegally obtain home mortgages on Long Island, officials said.

Manjeet Bawa, 46, was the sixth person arrested in the past two days in the scheme to get mortgages at almost twice the actual value of homes, by falsely inflating the properties' worth, officials said. In all, 19 homes in Nassau and Suffolk counties were involved, and all ended up in foreclosure, officials said.

Bawa pleaded not guilty in federal District Court in Central Islip to a charge of conspiracy to commit bank fraud. He was released on \$250,000 bond by federal Magistrate A. Kathleen Tomlinson.

His attorney, Neil Greenberg of Westbury, declined to comment, as did federal prosecutor James Miskiewicz.

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Tuesday, five people were arrested in the scheme, including its alleged ring leader, Aaron Wider, 50, of Copiague, the head of HTFC Corp. in Garden City.

Wider, who pleaded not guilty Tuesday, was held without bail after his attorney said he could not come up with a bail package. The attorney, Tracey Gaffey, declined to comment.

In court papers, Miskiewicz was prepared to argue that Wider should not be released because he was a danger to the community.

He said Wider had been tape recorded by the FBI telling a cooperating witness "how to create forged documentation that could be used to fraudulently transfer properties to keep creditors from recouping losses." Miskiewicz quoted Wider as telling the cooperator: "I am smarter than every one of the attorneys out there."

In pending federal civil litigation, Wider offered a forged document to support his side, Miskiewicz said. The FBI determined the document was printed on stationery not yet manufactured at the time it was supposedly dated, Miskiewicz said.

Further, the prosecutor said, when FBI agents searched Wider's home in April, they discovered he had tapped into the electrical supply lines of a neighbor, "either because his own service was shut off or to evade the payment of utility fees."

Four defendants have pleaded not guilty and were released on \$250,000 bond each, officials said. A fifth defendant was arrested in Florida and is being brought to Long Island for arraignment.