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FORMER DIXIE COUNTY BUILDING AND ZONING INSPECTOR SENTENCED TO 78 MONTHS IN PRISON FOR FRAUD, BRIBERY

GAINESVILLE -- Thomas F. Kirwin, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, today announced the November 9, 2009 sentencing of former Dixie County Building and Zoning Inspector, Willie "Billy" Keen, Jr. (60) to 78 months in prison for federal program fraud, conspiracy, bribery, and making false statements.

Keen was convicted of federal program fraud following a two-day trial in March of this year in the United States District Court in Gainesville. The evidence at trial showed that between March and October 2003, Keen, who was then employed as the building and zoning inspector for Dixie County, fraudulently applied for Community Development Block Grant and State Housing Initiative Program funds to renovate his personal home. Because Keen did not financially qualify for these funds and was otherwise prohibited from receiving the funds as a result of his position, Keen applied for the funds in his girlfriend's name, falsely representing that she was the owner of his home. During the course of 2003, Keen fraudulently obtained approximately \$32,000 in grant funds, which he used to renovate his house. Testimony at trial established that after Keen learned he was being investigated, he removed documents from the county clerk's official files and substituted a deed that purported to convey his house to his girlfriend. The deed conflicted with records previously produced to the FBI by the clerk of court.

In a separate case, Keen, and two Dixie County Commissioners, John Driggers and Alton Land, were charged with conspiring to accept bribes, accepting bribes, and lying to federal agents. Keen, Driggers, and Land were convicted of these charges at the conclusion of a four-day trial in United States District Court in Gainesville in August of this year. Evidence introduced at this trial included video and audio recordings of defendants meeting with an undercover FBI agent and accepting cash payments for influence before the Dixie County Board of County Commissioners. Evidence at trial also showed that defendants offered their approval for developments within Dixie County in exchange for money and other inducements, and that they attempted to influence other members of the Board to approve these developments.

In addition to the 78- month sentence of imprisonment, the Court ordered the forfeiture of Keen's house in Old Town, Florida and ordered him to pay \$32,010 in restitution.

Sentencing of Keen's co-defendants, Driggers and Land, in the bribery case is set for January 4, 2010 before the Honorable Chief United States District Judge Stephan P. Mickle.

United States Attorney Kirwin commended the diligent efforts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation whose investigation led to the conviction and sentence in these cases. The cases were prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Gregory P. McMahon.