

Phoenix police arrest repairman on 'Most Wanted Unlicensed Contractors' list on fraud charges



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(Photo: Arizona Registrar of Contractors)

Phoenix police arrested one of the state's most-wanted unlicensed contractors Thursday on three felony charges, according to the Arizona Attorney General's Office.

Phoenix resident Keith Edward Benevento operates under the business name How It's Done Handyman Service. He was featured on the state's infamous Most Wanted Unlicensed Contractors list, which is maintained by the state Registrar of Contractors.

Benevento told *The Arizona Republic* on Friday that he performs only small handyman-scale jobs, not large-scale jobs that would require a contractor's license.

The allegations against him are baseless and the result of a vindictive investigator for the Registrar of Contractors who lost a previous case against him in February, he said.

Registrar of Contractors Jim Knupp said the current case was opened in June 2015, eight months before the first case went to trial, so the claim that current case was some sort of vengeance was mistaken.

In the current matter, Benevento is accused of stealing more than \$15,000 from an Arizona family while performing unlicensed construction work, according to the Attorney General's Office.

Benevento presented invoices to a Surprise couple in their 80s for more than \$15,900 for home repairs that should have cost less than \$4,000, according to the agency. He misled the couple about the extent of his work and how long certain jobs took to complete, the agency said.

"Due to alleged poor workmanship, investigators determined it would cost an additional \$2,000 to \$3,000 to correct Benevento's reportedly defective work," the agency said in a statement.

Benevento was indicted by a Maricopa County grand jury on charges of fraudulent schemes and artifices, fraudulent schemes and practices, and theft for work between Jan. 1, 2011, and April 30, 2011.

Benevento told *The Republic* he did a number of small-scale jobs during the course of a few months for the Surprise couple, such as replacing tile and grout on a back patio and in a laundry room, but nothing approaching \$15,900.

"I can assure you of this: I had nothing to do with stealing anything from anybody or anything like that," he said.

After he worked for the couple, an out-of-state daughter who was handling the finances refused to pay a bill for around \$300, Benevento said. He moved on because it wasn't worth the effort to contest, he said.

The idea that he received anything close to \$15,000 from the couple is "absolutely" incorrect, he said. He operates a one-man service that charges \$360 for eight hours of work. He doesn't do big remodel jobs, he said.

"I would have had to have basically built a brand new house for these folks to be able to charge that kind of money. I have never made \$15,000 on a job in my life," he said.

The state's delay in pursuing the matter also is suspect, Benevento said.

"This is something that happened a long time ago, and then all of a sudden, now it's coming. Had somebody thought I had done something wrong then, my question is: Why wasn't it brought up then? This seems to me somebody is being vindictive," he said.

Assistant Attorney General Andy Kvesic is prosecuting the case. He declined comment.

The Registrar of Contractors asked that anyone information about unlicensed contractors to call the agency at 602-542-1525 or 877-692-9762.

The state's most-wanted list generally features 10 people, though it currently lists six, including Benevento.

The roll call of most-wanted unlicensed contractors is intended shine light on repairmen and -women who provide poor-quality roofing, drywalling, plumbing, carpentry and related work, according to the state agency that licenses contractors.

The list is modeled after the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list of fugitives.

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