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\$500K in N.Y. fraud detailed

(<http://www.suntimes.com/business/371963,CST-NWS-rside05.article>)

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In a few years, John Thomas went from defrauding businesses in New York to orchestrating multimillion-dollar real estate deals in Chicago.

Under the name Bernard Barton Jr., Thomas operated several businesses in Manhattan that leased billboard space.

In many cases, his companies had no control over the billboards they purported to lease. But Thomas used the business as a ruse to gather credit card information from customers and pile unauthorized charges onto those accounts.

An affidavit filed by FBI Agent Daniel Quinn detailed more than \$500,000 in fraud Thomas carried out against such targets as Computer Associates International Inc. and American Express, mostly in the late 1990s.

Quinn said Thomas and a partner, Louis Giordano, charged more than \$140,000 on an American Express business account Thomas obtained using his father's Social Security number.

The agent said many of the charges were for furniture, jewelry, liquor and hotel stays that could not have been business expenses. Quinn said Bernard Barton Sr. told him he "has disowned his son for his continued lying and dishonest behavior."

Thomas and Giordano pleaded guilty to fraud charges in 2004 and concentrated their business activities in Chicago. Their original company, Carnegie Realty Partners, has been dissolved, and Thomas, without Giordano, now operates under the name Morgan Street Properties LLC.

But one of his earliest ventures in Chicago was another billboard company, Outdoor Solutions Inc., that went bankrupt in 2001. Its biggest creditor was the Teachers' Retirement System of Illinois pension fund, which it owed more than \$48,000 for back rent.

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