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Pasadena police's onetime spokesman pleads guilty to violating federal firearms laws

By MATT HAMILTON SEP 21, 2018 | 3:00 AM



Vasken Gourdikian, 48, was the spokesman for the Pasadena Police Department. (KTLA-TV)

A longtime Pasadena police officer pleaded guilty Thursday to illegally dealing more than 100 guns across Southern California and, in one case, making false statements on government paperwork during a gun sale.

Vasken Gourdikian, a former lieutenant who also once served as spokesman for Pasadena's police force, entered his plea in downtown Los Angeles to the two felony counts. He faces up to 30 months in federal prison.

His defense attorney, Mark Werksman, said he planned to ask U.S. District Judge Stephen V. Wilson for leniency at a sentencing hearing scheduled for February 2019.

"He never meant any harm. And he found himself afoul of some very complex federal firearms laws that make it illegal to sell firearms in the volume that he did over a short period of time without a license," Werksman said. "For \$25, he could have purchased a federal firearms license and he wouldn't have been in trouble."

In his plea agreement, Gourdikian, 48, acknowledged selling at least 108 firearms without a license from March 2014 to February 2017. Several of those firearms were "off roster" handguns — firearms that sworn police officers are eligible to purchase but are otherwise not directly available to the public from licensed dealers.

Gourdikian also admitted to submitting erroneous information when buying a Smith & Wesson pistol at a Brea gun shop in 2014, according to the plea agreement. Gourdikian claimed that he was the buyer when, in fact, he was purchasing it for an unnamed person who retrieved the gun in Ontario, according to court documents.

Much of his business relied on Calguns.net, an online forum for firearms enthusiasts. There, he advertised weapons for sale and arranged purchases, according to court papers.

mandatory 10-day waiting period that civilians must obey.

"Those who sell guns illegally need to be held accountable, especially those who abuse a position of public trust," U.S. Atty. Nick Hanna said in a statement earlier this year.

At least one of the firearms sold by Gourdikian was found at a crime scene, although it was not used in a crime.

Werksman, the defense attorney, said his client had provided "exemplary service" to Pasadena during 23 years as an officer. He portrayed Gourdikian as a hobbyist who believed his side gig was aboveboard.

"When do you become a dealer? There's no strict definition," Werksman said. "Basically he got carried away with the volume over the period of time, and didn't realize he was crossing the line."

The attorney added: "He takes responsibility for it and he's resolved the case in a responsible way."

A Pasadena police officer since 1994, Gourdikian was placed on paid administrative leave after agents with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives raided his Sierra Madre home in 2017 and seized a cache of guns. He stopped receiving a salary after he was indicted in March and later resigned.

As a condition of his plea agreement, Gourdikian agreed to forfeit ownership of dozens of the firearms seized from his home.

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