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## **East Chicago employees charged with vote fraud**

VOTE FRAUD -- Nine new counts filed against eight defendants

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**E**AST CHICAGO | Indiana Attorney General Steve Carter said Thursday voting fraud in this city hasn't been a series of random acts.

"It's not an accident -- the 53 people who have been charged thus far with 200 felonies. I don't think that happens by accident," Carter said in announcing a new round of nine felony charges.

The Attorney General and Lake County Prosecutor Bernard A. Carter named eight people accused of voting in city elections in 2003 and 2004 while living outside the city. State law forbids voting outside a person's home precinct.

All eight surrendered to authorities Thursday and are free on bond pending trial.

They are:

Ricardo Alamillo, 35, of Hammond, a former East Chicago city court bailiff.

Ezequiel Godinez, 53, of Merrillville, a former East Chicago electrical maintenance supervisor.

Michael Harretos, 63, of Schererville, a former East Chicago filtration plant manager.

Demetrios A. Hasapis, 43, of Munster, an East Chicago Fire Department captain.

Ronald W. Komendat, 53, of Highland, a former East Chicago policeman.

Mabel Komendat, 44, of Highland, Ronald Komendat's former wife.

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Joseph R. Pedraza, 63, of St. John, an East Chicago Fire Department captain and mechanic.

Constance D. Simmons-Pedraza, 52, of St. John, a city school paraprofessional and Joseph Pedraza's wife.

The charges arose from a continuing investigation into the discredited May 2003 Democratic mayoral primary in which former Mayor Robert Pastrick's re-election campaign was accused of manufacturing a razor-thin victory margin with tainted

absentee ballots.

The Indiana Supreme Court later overturned that result, and voters replaced Pastrick with his chief opponent, George Pabey, in a special fall 2004 election.

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The Attorney General's office, the county prosecutor and Indiana State police formed a task force to investigate allegations of vote fraud.

The new charges allege the eight defendants reported East Chicago addresses to the county elections board to be eligible to vote in the city, but city employment records and other official documents indicate they lived elsewhere. Mabel Komendat is charged with two counts of vote fraud for both the 2003 and 2004 elections.

The Times reported last year Ronald Komendat has three publicly-financed jobs and his signed timecards indicate he was paid to work two of those jobs at the exact same times on more than two dozen instances in 2005.

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Ronald Komendat was working six- and seven-day weeks as an poor-relief inspector for North Township and as a Lake County Safety Officer at the East Chicago Marina. Asked about the apparent overlaps, he acknowledged "fudging" his timecards but denied that it amounted to ghost payrolling.

Ronald Komendat also is the owner of Regional Services, which was hired under Mayor George Pabey's administration to mow city-owned lots for \$125 an hour.

Times staff writers Joe Carlson and Ruthann Robinson contributed to this report.

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