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Est. 1940

Brazen Scammers Stealing High-Profile Properties

by Gloria Tison, Manager/Counsel - Kotner Title

Scammers are emboldened and are running scams on high-profile properties. In August 2024, Lisa Jeanine Findley of Missouri was charged in a criminal complaint of orchestrating a scheme to conduct a fraudulent sale of Graceland, the former home of Elvis Presley. Findley falsely claimed that in 2018, Elvis Presley's daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, borrowed \$3.8 million from Naussany Investments & Private Lending LLC, pledged Graceland as collateral for the loan, and failed to repay the debt before her death. Naussany Investments is a fictitious private lender. Findley allegedly fabricated loan documents and forged the signatures of Lisa Marie Presley and a Florida State notary public. She then filed a false creditor's claim with the Superior Court of California and a fake deed of trust with the Shelby County Register's Office in Memphis. She also filed a fraudulent foreclosure notice in one of Memphis' daily newspapers announcing that Naussany Investments planned to auction Graceland on May 23, 2024. Elvis Presley's family filed suit to stop the sale. When the scheme attracted global attention, Findley claimed that the person responsible for the scheme was an identity thief in Nigeria.

Now, there is another high-profile scheme on a luxury property. Spelling Manor, a 120-room home on the market for \$137.5 million, has been targeted by scammers named Mirga Phipps White and Nicholas Phipps White. Allegedly, the Whites executed a phony deed on the house and recorded it in Los Angeles County in June 2024. The Whites deny the allegations and insist that the property is theirs. They contend that Spelling Manor was fraudulently purchased with funds stolen from them by "The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" cast member Erika Girardi and her then-husband, Thomas Girardi. Litigation over ownership is preventing the sale of the house. In addition, the Whites are defendants in a pending lawsuit for allegedly filing fraudulent title documents to a \$55 million mansion in Newport Beach, California.

Once a scammer successfully files a false deed, they can try to take out a mortgage on the property, sell it, or rent it out. The property's valid owner then must go to court to clear the title. This type of fraud is most common on vacant land or vacation properties where the owner is often absent.

Title companies are often able to nip seller fraud in the bud. A trusted title company is trained to look for red flags. When we originate a new title insurance policy, we conduct hours of public records research to find potential title defects. This work enables us to identify fraudulent real estate documents and protect the homeowner from being victimized by scammers. We use CertifID, a third-party resource, to validate identities and to ensure wire transfers are safe and sent to the correct location. We also have a database of bad actors and illegitimate entities compiled by title underwriters. We insist on advanced fraud protection practices and serve as a resource when you have questions or concerns. Let Kotner Title serve as an ally for all your real estate transactions.



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