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South Gate gets funds back from foundation

Self-help guru Anthony Robbins' organizations return \$45,000 used by former City Treasurer Albert Robles.

Stiff report

SOUTH GATE — The city has once again been successful in retrieving funds illegally or improperly used by former City Treasurer Albert Robles.

The City Council Dec. 13 approved settlements with Robbins Research International for \$35,000 and the Anthony Robbins Foundation for \$10,000.

City Attorney Raul Salinas said Robles used the city funds to purchase a platinum membership in one of Robbins' motivational, self-help programs.

Salinas, in a written report to the City Council, said Edward Espinoza, contracted by the former administration to do promotional services, actually paid Robbins Research International \$55,000 on behalf of Robles on Sept. 23, 2002, but the city settled for \$35,000 to avoid litigation as the Robbins officials denied any wrongdoing.

The \$10,000 from the foundation was the actual amount paid by Espinoza for Robles on Sept. 18, 2002. Robbins' officials also denied any wrongdoing on the issue, saying they were not aware that the payments were illegal.

Robles and the three-member City Council majority who supported him and his actions were recalled Jan. 28, 2003.

In November 2004 Espinoza and Robles were named in federal indictments on charges includ-

ing mail and wire fraud, money laundering and theft or bribery concerning programs receiving federal funds, Salinas said.

Among the checks obtained by federal agents were the \$55,000 and \$10,000 ones from Espinoza to Robbins Research International using money obtained from the city through illicit means, Salinas said.

Espinoza pleaded guilty last July, testifying that he paid Robbins Research International with money received from "illegitimate proceeds of city funds from a contract awarded him through Robles," Salinas said.

Robles was found guilty of the federal charges in July and is awaiting sentencing, the city attorney added.

On Jan. 4, Robles, now 40, faces a pre-trial examination in Norwalk Superior Court along with co-defendants Angel Gonzalez and Ricardo Hernandez. The latter two are printers.

All are charged with crimes concerning the violation of state election laws in printing campaign materials in connection with the 2003 recall.

At that time, Robles was recalled with council allies consisting of Mayor Xochilt Ravalcaba, Vice Mayor Raul Moriel and Council woman Maria Benavides.

New council members who replaced the three fired then-City Manager Jesus Marez and Robles, who also was working as deputy city manager.

Robles is suing the city for wrongful termination over his firing.