

Jury orders Morningside lawyer Alfred Placeres to pay man 1M for bungle

Alleged he let friend use his name to lend her immigrant service center the appearance of law office

By [Erica Pearson](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Published: Friday, March 30, 2012, 4:00 AM

Prominent Morningside Heights immigration attorney and small business booster [Alfred Placeres](#) has been lauded by [Mayor Bloomberg](#) and dished out advice on Telemundo.

But this month, a Manhattan jury decided that Placeres owes a Venezuelan man a million dollars in damages after his case was bungled, landing him in immigration detention for more than a year.

Placeres denies the allegations and says he plans to appeal.

When engineer [Jose Borges](#) realized how long the feds might hold him in 2004, he had a nervous breakdown, he said.

“I started freaking out. I started crying and screaming. I never did anything wrong, these people just took advantage of me,” said Borges, 41, who lives in Fair Lawn, N.J.

“I just wanted to kill myself.”

In the legal malpractice suit, Borges’ lawyer alleged Placeres let a paralegal friend use his name to give her Flatiron District immigrant service center the appearance of a legit law office.

Placeres said he and the paralegal, [Adela Ivan](#), had an above-board arrangement — she would do her clients’ immigration paperwork, but he would pitch in if they needed a lawyer to appear in court. He says that was clear to Borges from the beginning.

“To me, the victim of all this is my reputation,” Placeres said. “She wasn’t doing anything on the sly . . . She was working on the immigration forms.”

Placeres is president of umbrella group New York State Federation of Hispanic Chambers of Commerce. Bloomberg gave him a “Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise Advocate of the Year” award in 2010.

Ivan, whose Entra America business is now defunct, could not be reached for comment. Borges' suit against her was dismissed based on statute of limitations and corporate immunity.

Last year, New York passed a law requiring all notaries (“notario” in Spanish) or non-attorney immigration businesses to post a disclaimer saying they are not an attorney and cannot give legal advice on immigration or other matters.

“He had been told that he was represented by a lawyer and it was just this woman pretending to be one,” said Borges' lawyer, [Paul O'Dwyer](#). “Most of the papers that were filed in court were just basically gobbledygook. They made absolutely no sense.”

Borges overstayed a tourist visa and came to Ivan for help; he was marrying a U.S. citizen and trying to fix his immigration status.

According to Borges, Ivan repeatedly told him — saying the advice was coming from Placeres — not to attend a Newark court hearing. He was ordered deported for not showing up.

Placeres says his plan was for Borges to show up without a lawyer so the judge would postpone it and give them more time. Borges, he says, made his own decision not to attend the hearing.

Borges wound up spending more than 400 days in federal custody and lost his job at Alcoa Howmet because his work permit was revoked.

During his year at a Jamaica, Queens, federal detention center, he was sent to nearby psychiatric facility Holliswood Hospital, paralyzed by depression and panic attacks.

After Borges was released, in 2005, the feds said he had the right to stay.

On March 2, a New York City Civil Court jury said Placeres owes him \$1.10 million for his lost income and pain and suffering.

Read more: <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/uptown/jury-orders-morningside-lawyer-alfred-placeres-pay-man-1m-bungle-article-1.1053152#ixzz1r0Vxz3ef>