



NONPROFITS: FUNDRAISING & DEVELOPMENT

# Guilty Pleas in Petco Park "Charity Fraud and Hot Dogs" Scandal

03.18.26 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



In about a week or so, Padres fans will flood San Diego's iconic Gaslamp Quarter for Petco Park's March 26th home opener against the Detroit Tigers. There will be festivities and special discounts all day long at the neighborhood's wall-to-wall restaurants and watering holes.

Ticketholders for the game will also be able to enjoy nostalgic baseball fare like hot dogs, beer, and popcorn from the stadium's many food locations ... albeit at the traditional ballpark extortionate prices.

Some of the concession stands at Petco Park have been operated in recent years as part of a special Padres-charity partnership benefitting a few fortunate local 501(c)(3)s. The chosen organizations run the food stations with their own volunteers in return for a 10% cut of the (quite considerable) revenue. The sports franchises get a good deal from the favorable publicity as well as a way to solve their perennial staffing problems for these seasonal, part-time gigs.

From 2016 to 2023, Martin Rebollo and Noly Ilardo, who said they represented a local Little League group, Chula Vista FastPitch, were awardees of this program. Particularly in the later years, they were familiar faces at the venue, running the most successful and largest string of concession stands there.

But Padres regulars at the 2026 opening game – waiting to order their nachos or ice cream – will likely not run into either Mr. Rebollo or Mr. Ilardo. The two men are on their way to long stretches in prison, federal prosecutors just announced.

***Smoke, Mirrors, and Identity Theft***



The entire operation was smoke and mirrors, an elaborate charade of identity theft and greed.

Two and a half years ago, in late August 2023, the investigative team at [Voice of San Diego \(VOSD\)](#), the nation's first independent and nonprofit newspaper, cracked the case wide open. Spearheaded by investigative ace Will Huntsberry (now assistant editor), VOSD published a series of articles on four successive days, beginning with [Nonprofits Get a Cut of Petco Park Food Proceeds, But One of the Biggest Nonprofits at the Stadium Doesn't Exist](#) (August 28, 2023).

Next up were: [The Fake Charity at Petco Park Has Also Been Working at Snapdragon Stadium](#) (August 29, 2023); [Fallout Over Fake Nonprofit Continues at Snapdragon Stadium and Petco Park](#) (August 30, 2023); and [More on that Fake Charity that's Been Raking in Cash at Petco](#) (August 31, 2023).

By the end of that week, the VOSD team had so successfully blown apart the scam that Padres management shut it all down immediately.

Mr. Huntsberry published a few follow-up articles in the next weeks, including about the miscreants' operations at other area sports venues, including the location of the brand-new soccer team. See, e.g., [Sports Arena Realized Fake Softball Charity Wasn't Real Years Ago](#) (September 6, 2023). Soon after the original "charity" concessions were closed down at Petco Park, a nonprofit entity named "C V Fast Patch" was incorporated with the State of California. Its listed address was at a home owned by Martin Rebollo, according to property records.

We told you about this tawdry tale in one of our favorite all-time posts: [Some Charity Fraud With Your Hot Dog, Sir?](#) (September 1, 2023), [FPLG Blog](#).

There were follow-up blog posts, discussing these developments as well as the wider issues involved in this notorious charity-fraud case. Those topics include, for instance, the responsibility of corporate sponsors as well as the growing and critical role of nonprofit news sources in exposing wrongdoing. See: [Charity Fraud & Ballpark Hotdogs: An Update](#) (September 14, 2023); and [Hot Dogs, Charity Oversight, Nonprofit News, and Democracy](#) (November 14, 2024) [FPLG Blog](#).

### ***Guilty Pleas***

Since the end of 2023, there have been whispers about law enforcement (particularly, the FBI) taking an interest in this case but – otherwise – crickets.

Finally last week, word came from the San Diego U.S. Attorney's Office. Martin Rebollo and Noly Ilardo pleaded guilty to multiple counts of fraud and conspiracy. Mr. Rebollo also admitted to tax evasion and Social Security disability fraud, for which he has agreed to pay restitution of almost half a million dollars. See [Petco Park Charity Scammers Plead Guilty to Fraud Conspiracy](#) (March 11, 2026) Will Huntsberry, [Voice of San Diego](#).

Sentencing in the two cases is set for May and June, 2026. The conspiracy charge alone carries a likely long prison sentence.

In additional reporting including on the most recent VOSD podcast – see [VOSD Podcast: Fake Charity Guys Pocketed \\$2 Million](#) (March 13, 2026) – there is more detail on the heavy lifting and risk



in getting this charity-fraud story over the finish line.

The original tip came from someone who saw what appeared to be obvious labor-law violations. It was almost an open secret at the stadium that the charity “volunteers” at the Rebollo/Ilardo stands were random local youth who were paid in cash under the table at far less than minimum wage.

Will Huntsberry recalled his suggestion at an early editorial meeting that the first step might be a simple Google search. But VOSD editor-in-chief, Scott Lewis, offered a key fact: He had known the (real, not fake) youth team’s organizers back in the day, and could confirm they had officially shut it down in 2014.

However, moving on from the “something’s fishy” stage of the hunt involved much more work for this local news outlet that doesn’t have the resources of a major media organization. The VOSD team successfully uncovered what it believed was a huge haul from the fraud – at least hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The federal prosecutor, Jeffrey Hill, said recently that “Voice’s reporting was the genesis for the criminal investigation.” That official probe, with its full panoply of investigative tools, “confirmed many of the details in Voice’s stories,” except that the loot total was exponentially larger: several million dollars.

### ***Conclusion***

In *Padres Say Charity Problems Are Fixed — And No Further* (March 17, 2026) *Voice of San Diego*, Will Huntsberry noted that the Padres are still less than eager to acknowledge any responsibility, despite the plain fact that the ball club management – through its concessions contractor, Delaware North – approved and continually renewed the award of this valuable and coveted opportunity for nine years to these fraudsters.

The oversight process was flimsy to the point of being nonexistent: way below even the lowest rung of acceptable stewardship of charitable funds.

– Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director