

Facade of success hid strife in family

Erpenbecks split,
case details reveal

By James McNair
The Cincinnati Enquirer

Like a story line from a Shakespearean tragedy, the demise of the Erpenbeck home-building empire stemmed from a desire to appear successful, a facade of family unity and, ultimately, a female member's backlash against a male-dominated hierarchy.

The Erpenbecks, a three-generation family of Northern Kentucky home builders, already were a troubled clan when two of its elders – Bill Erpenbeck and his father, Tony – were arrested on federal obstruction-of-justice charges Thursday. The two men were accused in an FBI sting of tampering with a witness at an upcoming sentencing hearing for Bill Erpenbeck. The witness, who wore an FBI transmitter during their conversations, was his sister, Lori Erpenbeck.

According to testimony and statements Friday in U.S. District Court, strained relations between some Erpenbeck family members gave way to a death threat, a suicide threat and fear.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Kathleen Brinkman said Tony Erpenbeck, 69, not only was a "danger" to his daughter, but had "treated badly" Phyllis Erpenbeck, his second wife and stepmother to his five children.

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Wed, Oct 31, 2018