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**Subject:** A bit more detail of the search

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By Jon Burstein, Brittany Wallman and Peter Franceschina

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Dozens of FBI and IRS agents seized documents and computer records Wednesday night from Scott Rothstein's law firm, a day after the Fort Lauderdale attorney's dramatic return from Morocco and his lengthy meeting with federal prosecutors.

Federal agents are investigating what investors describe as a Ponzi scheme running into the hundreds of millions of dollars. Search warrant documents obtained Thursday by the Sun Sentinel show the extent of the items removed from the law firm.

Authorities seized 44 boxes of documents, an unspecified amount of cash, computers and a key to a Ferrari, among other things.

The FBI and IRS agents spent 7 1/2 hours Wednesday night going through offices at the Rothstein Rosenfeldt Adler law firm, after the tough-talking, sharp-dressing attorney returned to Florida and sat down with federal prosecutors.

Federal authorities went into the law firm's 16th floor offices at 401 E. Las Olas Blvd. looking for documents related to an investment business that Rothstein's colleagues say he secretly ran from his secure offices, according to a search warrant.

Documents seized include boxes of "deal folders," bank records from Gibraltar Private Bank & Trust and Rothstein's personal records involving jewelry and car purchases, the search warrant shows.

Agents also searched the office of Debra Villegas, the firm's chief operating officer. Inside her office was a flight itinerary for Rothstein's recent trip to Morocco, according to the search warrant.

In addition to looking for documents related to Rothstein's side business, agents were looking for all "still or moving pictures, film and/or data obtained from surveillance video," the search warrant states. Two boxes of video recorder CDs were seized, and FBI technicians copied the hard drives of a number of computers. They also took a manila folder marked, "shred."

Rothstein has not been seen publicly since his return.

"I'm sitting here hiding with my lawyer," Rothstein said Wednesday afternoon, when reached on his cell phone by the Sun Sentinel. He said he didn't have time to talk and subsequent calls went unanswered.

Kendall Coffey, the former U.S. attorney representing the Rothstein, Rosenfeldt and Adler law firm, said Rothstein's attorney, Marc Nurik, had informed him that Rothstein planned to accept responsibility for the missing money and "face the music." Nurik could not be reached for comment.

The law firm consented to the search of the other areas of the office, Coffey said.

"We are fully cooperating. We have afforded them our IT guy," Coffey said. "We requested that they take appropriate precautions to protect attorney-client files."

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An FBI spokeswoman at the building, Judy Orihuela, would only say, "The FBI and IRS are here on official business."

If Rothstein is cooperating with federal authorities, it could be days or weeks before prosecutors are prepared to file formal charges, Coffey said.

"So as obvious as it may be ... that he is arrestable, you don't get instant handcuffs," he said.

Investor groups say they are out huge sums of money.

"We've been consistently hearing it's not tens of millions, it's hundreds of millions of dollars," Coffey said. "If it is a Ponzi scheme, which it appears to be, you don't know the recycled losses."

Some of the firm's lawyers will sit down with a court-appointed receiver, retired Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Hebert Stettin, to go through the firm's finances, which were closely controlled by Rothstein, Coffey said.

If Rothstein has information about potential crimes committed by others, now would be the time to share that with authorities, said Robert Jarvis, a professor at Nova Southeastern University Law School.

"Certainly if you are going to spill the beans and you have beans to spill, the time to do so is when you are in hot water," he said.

Political operative Roger Stone, who briefly had a consulting firm with Rothstein, said he distanced himself after becoming suspicious of the source of the money powering his conspicuous personal and political spending.

"Rothstein could not read a business sheet," Stone said. "He could not read or write a business plan."

Rothstein was more interested in creating "the impression he's important" -- from the bodyguards to the name-dropping -- rather than actually attempting to exert influence in the political arena, Stone said.

There were signs of life at Rothstein's \$6 million home in Fort Lauderdale's Harbor Beach neighborhood on Wednesday afternoon, but no trace of the man himself. Guards said neither he nor his wife were home, or expected.

A police cruiser rolled by. A private guard was stationed behind a black gate, and another in Rothstein's open lot across the street. A Bentley, Rolls Royce and Cadillac sat on the driveway outside the home. A yacht, and a matching tender, floated at the dock behind the house.

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