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## Judge stops Anaheim land auction

### Allegations of stolen secrets and misappropriated land undo the heavily promoted event.

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ANAHEIM – A Superior Court judge has ordered a stop to a land auction that had been expected to bring potentially thousands of bidders to the Anaheim Convention Center this weekend.

The judge issued the order on Thursday afternoon, after allegations surfaced that the company handling the auction had stolen trade secrets and diverted property from another company.

The auction has been heavily promoted, with

about \$400,000 spent on billboards and print and broadcast ads. Because of that, an attorney for one of the companies said thousands of people could still show up at the convention center on Sunday.

City officials were referring calls from interested bidders to the company behind the auction, Marken Enterprises. A man who answered the phone at Marken said he couldn't "say a thing," then hung up.

Orange County Superior Court Judge David Velasquez halted the auction after a company called [LandAuction.com](http://LandAuction.com) claimed that two former employees had misappropriated trade secrets and property.

Those former employees, Mark Girk and Michael Belvedere, secretly set up Marken Enterprises to compete with LandAuction.com, according to attorney Javier Van Oordt, who is representing LandAuction. They e-mailed company documents to themselves and acquired property while they were still working for LandAuction.com, Van Oordt said.

The two men agreed to call off Sunday's auction at the convention center as part of a settlement reached this week. They also agreed not to compete with their former employer for four years, to return lead lists and other trade secrets, and to allow LandAuction to "cherry-pick" the best of

their land.

Some 180 parcels of vacant land scattered throughout California and other Western states had been scheduled to go on the auction block Sunday at the convention center. The center's administrative services manager, Tanya LaSoya, said she has "no way of knowing" whether people would still show up.

The city has an application process for groups that want to use the Convention Center, which includes checking bank references, spokesman John Nicoletti said. But, he said, "we're a public facility, we can't be discriminatory" to groups that want to use the center.

City News Service contributed to this report

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