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Release # 170-2006
www.queensda.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2006

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**D.A. BROWN: COLLEGE POINT WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY
TO DEFRAUDING TWO ELDERLY WOMEN OUT OF \$245,000**

Used Money to Buy Auto and Block Island Property and Start Carrot Cake Business

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a College Point woman has admitted to stealing more than \$245,000 in savings from two women in their nineties during a twelve-month period between 2004 and 2005.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant's acts of kindness were, in reality, acts of greed that robbed her victims of substantial amounts of money that they had saved for their retirement. Crimes against the elderly – whether they involve physical or, as in this case, financial harm – are despicable because the victims are so vulnerable. The defendant must now face the consequences of her actions."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Patricia Murtaugh, 58, of 40-25 College Point Boulevard in College Point, Queens, who was arrested on June 1, 2006. She pleaded guilty yesterday before Acting Supreme Court Justice Pauline Mullings to a charge of second-degree grand larceny and signed confessions of judgment for the full amount of monies stolen from her two victims. Justice Mullings set sentencing for September 6, 2006, at which time she indicated that she would likely sentence the defendant to one to three years in prison if she provides some restitution to her victims by the date of sentencing and one and one-half years to four and one-half years in prison if she does not.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, the defendant was hired by 90-year-old Joan Coughlan, of Manhattan, to assist her in cataloging and filing her deceased brother's possessions. At the time, Ms. Coughlan had three accounts at the Emigrant Savings Bank with amounts totaling more than \$300,000. Between December 16, 2004 and March 3, 2005, three checks totaling \$9,400 were drawn on these accounts and made payable to the defendant. On March 18, 2005, the defendant – without the knowledge or permission of Ms. Coughlan – opened up a joint account at a Chase Manhattan Bank in Queens in both their names and, between March 18, 2005, and August 12, 2005, transferred more than \$150,000 from Ms. Coughlan's Emigrant accounts to the joint Chase account. Thereafter, the defendant withdrew the entire transferred amount from the Chase account by way of cashier checks, personal checks, teller withdrawals and debit purchases made on the account.

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The District Attorney said that the defendant also befriended 94-year-old Elizabeth Shanks, of the Bronx, and offered to assist her with paying her bills and that, in order to make it easier for the defendant to help her, she obtained from the victim a power of attorney. On May 4, 2005 – unbeknownst to Ms. Shanks and without her permission – the defendant opened up a joint account at a Queens Chase Manhattan Bank Branch in both their names. Five days later, on May 10, 2005, the defendant transferred approximately \$137,000 from Shanks' Citibank account – again without Shanks' knowledge or permission – to the Chase account and thereafter withdrew \$85,000 from the Chase account by means of cashier checks, personal checks, teller withdrawals and wire transfers.

The District Attorney said that based on a review of subpoenaed records it appears that the defendant used some of the money to purchase a Ford automobile, pay rent on her apartment, make a down payment on a house on Block Island in Rhode Island and open a carrot cake business on Block Island.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Evelyn Alegre and Ketty Larco of the District Attorney's Detective Squad under the supervision of Sergeant John Kenna Lieutenant Robert Burke and the overall supervision of Chief Lawrence J. Festa and Deputy Chief Albert D. Velardi, with the assistance of Laurie Woods of the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Project and Senior Forensic Accountant James Dever of the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Gregory C. Pavlides, Chief of District Attorney Brown's Economic Crimes Bureau prosecuted the case under the supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Assistant District Attorney Linda M. Cantoni, Counsel to the Investigations Division.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org.