



RICHARD A. BROWN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY
QUEENS COUNTY**
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568
718-286-6000

Release # 27-2007
www.queensda.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2007

CONTACT: KEVIN RYAN
NICOLE NAVAS
MERIS CAMPBELL
(718)286-6315

D.A. BROWN: QUEENS CONTRACTOR CHARGED
WITH \$175,000 HOME REMODELING FRAUD

Allegedly Guttled Couple's Woodside House and Stole Down Payment

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a Howard Beach contractor hired to renovate a Woodside couple's house has been charged with defrauding them out of more than \$175,000 in savings by gutting the interior of their home and then walking off the job after only two weeks.

District Attorney Richard A. Brown said, "The defendant is accused of collecting a sizeable down payment and then failing to complete the work as contracted. Consumers need to be very careful about the people they hire to come into their homes to do work. A home is often a consumer's largest investment and a ripoff as alleged in this case can have long-term consequences."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as David Celerio, 36, of 2511 Marine Place in Bellmore, Long Island. Celerio is the owner of Midtown Home Improvements, Inc., located at 102-15 159th Road in Howard Beach. He is being held pending arraignment later today in Queens Criminal Court in Kew Gardens on a charge of second-degree grand larceny. If convicted, he faces up to fifteen years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, Rakhshanda Razi and her husband, Shah Razi, contacted the defendant's company, Midtown Home Improvements, Inc., in October 2005 to do construction work on their 60th Street house in Woodside. The defendant allegedly claimed that for approximately \$300,000 his company would demolish their one-family house and remodel it into a legal two-family house with a lot size the same as the present one. On October 10, 2005, the defendant allegedly requested \$3,000 from the Razis as a down payment for the work to be done on their home. That same day, Mrs. Razi signed a contract with the defendant and his company which stated that the remodeling cost was \$300,000 payable in two payments – initially \$200,000 and a \$100,000 payment after the work was completed. Two weeks later, Mrs. Razi signed an amendment to the contract, in which the total cost was decreased to \$280,000 and the initial cost was decreased to \$176,000. The defendant allegedly told the Woodside couple that the initial money would be put in an escrow account to be used for supplies and materials during the re-modeling process.

The District Attorney said it is further alleged that, on November 1, 2005, the Razis gave the defendant a check in the amount of \$174,052 to be placed in the escrow account. On that same day, the defendant and his workers allegedly began demolishing the home and, during the course of the next two weeks, took out the interior walls and dismantled the kitchen before leaving and never returning. After a few months of phone calls to the defendant, it is alleged that neither of the Razis were able to get in touch with him nor have him return any of their money.

According to the District Attorney, the couple then contacted his Economic Crimes Bureau to complain that they have been cheated by the defendant Celerio. The ensuing investigation determined that the \$174,052 check written by the Razis was not deposited in an escrow account but in an account in the name of "Midtown Building and Construction Corp." for which the defendant was the sole signatory. The investigation further determined that the majority of withdrawals made from the account were cash withdrawals, bill payments and payroll checks and did not reflect construction activity done on the Razis' residence.

-more-

The investigation was conducted by Sergeant John W. Kenna and Detectives Patrick F. Dolan and Jerome D. Pugh of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau under the supervision of Lieutenant Robert J. Burke and the overall supervision of Chief Lawrence J. Festa and Deputy Chief Albert D. Velardi.

Assistant District Attorney Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief of the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the overall supervision of Executive District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that a complaint is merely an accusation and that the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

#

Note to Editors: E-version of this press release posted at www.queensda.org.