



RICHARD A. BROWN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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

Release # 62-2007
www.queensda.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2007

CONTACT: QDA Press Office
718-286-6315

MAJOR AUTO THEFT RING SMASHED IN UNDERCOVER OPERATION

9 Charged With Stealing 60 Automobiles – Valued at \$2 Million – And Fencing Them Out of State

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, announced today that nine members of an auto theft ring allegedly responsible for stealing more than sixty high-end luxury automobiles with a total value exceeding \$2 million over the last year from owners in Queens and elsewhere has been closed down in an undercover operation.

The defendants have been charged in a 58-count indictment charging 66 pattern acts with, among other crimes, Enterprise Corruption under New York State's Organized Crime Control Act. The defendants are accused of stealing more than 60 automobiles – including expensive Hummer H2s and Cadillac Escalades – from Queens County and elsewhere and selling them mainly to out-of-state buyers. Many of the alleged stolen vehicles were recovered in Michigan, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, Florida, Michigan, Georgia and Mexico. The automobiles were allegedly stolen using key codes surreptitiously obtained from auto manufacturers.

District Attorney Brown said, "A sweeping fourteen-month investigation dubbed 'Operation Key Code' that utilized both court-authorized wiretaps and surveillance has dismantled an auto theft ring that specialized in fulfilling demand for luxury automobiles by stamping new vehicle identification numbers (VINs) on stolen automobiles and selling them to out-of-state buyers. It is alleged that each member of the ring had a specialized role in the operation – such as:

- 'Ringleaders' who received orders for vehicles and coordinated their theft;
- 'Locksmiths' who cut keys for the targeted vehicles using the VINs provided by the ringleaders;
- 'Steal Men' who actually stole the vehicles and delivered them to 'lay up' locations under the control of the ringleaders; and
- 'Taggers/brokers' who replaced or altered the stolen vehicles' true VIN plates and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHSTA) stickers with forgeries before the altered vehicles were sold.

The takedown of this major criminal enterprise represents another example of the partnership that exists in this City between law enforcement at all levels of government."

Commissioner Kelly said, "Detectives did outstanding work in stopping a stolen car ring from compromising entire car dealerships."

The defendants have been variously charged with Enterprise Corruption, Grand Larceny in the Second and Third Degrees, Attempted Grand Larceny in the Second and Third Degrees, Robbery in the Second Degree, Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Second and Third Degrees, and Conspiracy in the Fourth Degree. If convicted, the defendants face up to 25 years in prison.

The charges are the result of a 14-month joint undercover investigation by the New York City Police Department's Auto Crime Division and the Queens District Attorney's Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau.

It is alleged that the defendants and others were members and associates of an Automobile Theft Ring, an organized criminal enterprise based in Queens County that illicitly operated in the New York metropolitan area and stole automobiles mainly in Queens and Brooklyn.

It is further alleged that Deshawn Eaddy was one of two bosses of the enterprise and that he coordinated the theft, lay up and disposal of the targeted vehicles. Initially, Eaddy is alleged to have obtained keys for many of the vehicles through locksmith Aaron Perman, who, in turn, allegedly obtained the key codes (a code used in connection with the manufacture of certain automobile keys which enables only the key with the proper code to unlock and start a specific vehicle) which were needed to cut the keys from unindicted co-conspirator Anthony Harnow, an employee of Major Chevrolet located in Long Island City, Queens. It is further alleged that the keys were then regularly picked up from Perman and furnished to Eaddy by courier Melinda Mitchell who paid Perman \$50 per key and, among other things, also faxed VINs to Perman. Eaddy then allegedly directed defendants Ronald Ortega and Julio Marin – who were employed as “steal men” for the ring – to steal the vehicles.

It is additionally alleged that Jose Tavarez was the second boss of the enterprise and that he directed brothers Jose B. Arias and Jose E. Arias in taking possession of the stolen vehicles. As alleged “taggers/brokers” in the ring, the Arias brothers’ job was to alter the stolen vehicles by replacing and/or altering the true VIN plates and NHTSA stickers with false or forged one and then broker the sale of these stolen vehicles to individuals who often resided out-of-state. In addition, Tavarez allegedly fulfilled several vehicle orders by stealing cars independently of Eaddy by using a second locksmith – defendant Giovanni Gigante.

District Attorney Brown and Commissioner Kelly thanked the National Insurance Crime Bureau for their assistance and cooperation during the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Kenneth DeStefano and Michael McMahon of the New York City Police Department’s Auto Crime Division under the supervision of Sergeant Jonathan Schwartz, and the overall supervision of Lieutenant Gene Barelli, Captain Paul Inzirillo, and Deputy Inspector Charles V. Talamo.

The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Peri Alyse Kadanoff, Deputy Bureau Chief, and Robert E. Miller of the District Attorney’s Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gerard A. Brave, Chief, and Marc P. Resnick, Deputy Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that an indictment is merely an accusation and that defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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E-version of press release posted at www.queensda.org

DEFENDANT INFORMATION:

The defendants were arraigned yesterday in Queens County Supreme Court before Justice Richard L. Buchter.

“ALLEGED RINGLEADERS”

Deshawn Eaddy, 29, of 118 Tapscott Street in Brooklyn, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second-degree robbery, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Bail was set at \$250,000. The next court day is May 4, 2007.

Jose “Majimbe” Tavarez, 24, of 10314 Avenue J in Brooklyn, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Bail was set at \$150,000. The next court day is May 4, 2007.

“ALLEGED LOCKSMITHS”

Aaron Perman, 60, of 913 East 108th Street in Brooklyn, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Bail was set at \$50,000. The next court day is April 20, 2007.

Giovanni “John” Gigante, 39, of 219 Kingsland Avenue in Brooklyn, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Bail was set at \$100,000. The next court day is May 3, 2007.

“ALLEGED STEAL MEN”

Ronald Ortega, 23, of 211 Logan Street in Brooklyn, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second-degree robbery, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Ortega was ordered remanded on reserved bail application. The next court day is May 4, 2007.

Julio “Juice” Marin, 23, of 85-57 75th Street in Queens, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Bail was set at \$50,000. The next court day is May 4, 2007.

“ALLEGED TAGGERS/BROKERS”

Jose B “Monty Fingers” Arias, 25, of 90-49 Pitkin Avenue in Queens, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Arias was ordered remanded on reserved bail application. The next court day is May 4, 2007.

Jose E. “Eduardo” Arias, 20, of 233 Jamaica Avenue in Brooklyn, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Arias was ordered remanded on reserved bail application. The next court day is May 3, 2007.

“ALLEGED COURIER”

Melinda Mitchell, 28, of 1137 Sterling Street in Brooklyn, is charged with enterprise corruption, second- and third-degree grand larceny, second- and third-degree criminal possession of stolen property and fourth-degree conspiracy. Bail was set at \$25,000. The next court day is May 4, 2007.

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