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Release # 184-2007
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2007

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**D.A. BROWN: SUSPENDED QUEENS ATTORNEY AND LICENSED REAL ESTATE
BROKER CHARGED IN REAL ESTATE FRAUD SCHEMES**

Alleged Victims Include an Elderly Stroke Victim and U.S. Army Sergeant Serving Overseas

_____ Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a suspended Richmond Hill attorney and a licensed Queens Village real estate broker have been charged with selling the house out from under an elderly Jamaica, Queens, man who had been hospitalized after suffering a stroke and then repeatedly flipping the property to drive up the price. The suspended attorney is also charged in a separate real estate fraud scheme in which he fraudulently obtained the Queens house of a U.S. Army sergeant serving overseas.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendants are accused of participating in a carefully orchestrated real estate scheme that netted them hundreds of thousands of dollars in mortgage loan proceeds and involved everything from 'straw' buyers and 'show' checks to keep the unsuspecting homeowners from learning the truth – that their houses were being stolen right out from under them."

The District Attorney added, "A house is one of the biggest investments a person will make in their lifetime and that is why it is extremely important that homeowners not rush into any real estate transactions and that they consult reputable professionals of their own choosing. It is particularly troublesome that the closing attorney involved in this scheme is accused of having breached his fiduciary responsibilities for his own illegal profit."

The District Attorney identified the defendants as attorney N. Stephen Sukhdeo, 41, of 149-50 124th Street in South Ozone Park, and Mohammed M. Keita, 48, of 3426 Howard Boulevard in Baldwin, Long Island. The defendants are presently awaiting arraignment in Queens Criminal Court on charges of second-degree grand larceny, second-degree forgery, first-degree falsifying business records and first-degree offering a false instrument for filing. Sukhdeo, who maintains a law practice at 105-08 Jamaica Avenue in Richmond Hill, Queens, is additionally charged with criminal possession of forged documents. If convicted, the defendants face up to fifteen years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that a year-long investigation conducted by his office and the NYPD's Special Frauds Squad is alleged to have revealed that, in 2002, Clifford Goss, 78, entered into a verbal agreement with the defendant Keita to purchase his property at 106-43 156th Street in Jamaica, Queens. At the time, Keita was a licensed real estate broker in Queens Village. However, prior to the execution of a contract of sale, Mr. Goss suffered a debilitating stroke and was hospitalized. Upon his recovery, Mr. Goss learned that his house had been sold and transferred to an entity known as Cornerstone Properties, Inc.

District Attorney Brown said that in reviewing the business records of the New York City Department of Finance's Office of the Register, it was determined that a deed was recorded in February 2003 that stated Mr. Goss had sold his property to Cornerstone Properties, Inc., for no consideration and that the attorney representing Cornerstone Properties, Inc., was the defendant Sukhdeo, who previously had been Mr. Goss's attorney. In fact, according to the criminal charges, Mr. Goss's signature on the deed is alleged to have been forged, he had never entered into an agreement nor authorized the sale of his property to Cornerstone Properties, Inc. – which is owned by Thaneshwar Sukhdeo, the brother of defendant Sukhdeo – nor did he receive any proceeds from the sale. As a result, Mr. Goss lost more than \$200,000, the fair market value of his house.

The District Attorney said that a further review of City Register records revealed that Cornerstone Properties, Inc., subsequently sold Mr. Goss's property to Kaiby Keita – the daughter of defendant Keita – for \$310,000 and that the defendant Sukhdeo represented Ms. Keita at the transaction. At the closing, Cornerstone Properties allegedly received a check for \$129,379.66 from the proceeds of the sale. However, a review of the defendant Sukhdeo's escrow account at North Fork Bank indicated that the check made payable to Cornerstone Properties was never distributed to Cornerstone but instead deposited into the defendant's account for his own benefit.

Among the other funds disbursed during the closing, it is alleged that Kaiby Keita drew two disbursement checks (\$10,000 and \$13,900) on her Bank of America account made payable to Cornerstone Properties toward the purchase price. However, the checks were never negotiated.

The District Attorney said that such checks are commonly referred to as “show” checks in a mortgage fraud scheme. Such checks are displayed at a closing to reflect that the seller has been given money by the buyer and the check is placed in the seller’s attorney’s account so that it appears that the buyer paid some sort of down payment to the seller and that the seller was getting compensated for the same. Such checks would never be negotiated. They merely are presented and made part of the closing documents so that the mortgage scheme can be carried out.

The deed to Mr. Goss’s property was then allegedly transferred from Kaiby Keita to her father, defendant Keita, for no consideration and that the defendant Sukhdeo represented the defendant Keita at the closing. Subsequently, the defendant Keita sold the property to another individual on March 6, 2006, for \$650,000.

In a separate criminal complaint filed against the defendant Sukhdeo, it is alleged that Maryland resident Jillian Lord was given power of attorney over her sister Andine Lord’s property located at 104-13 126th Street in Richmond Hill, Queens. At the time, Andine Lord was a sergeant in the United States Army and serving overseas in Korea. In August 2002, the Lords entered into an agreement for real estate broker Richard Persaud to represent them in the sale of the Richmond Hill property. The following month, Jillian Lord, on her sister’s behalf, entered into a contract to sell the property to Persaud for \$237,000. The price was substantially less than the property’s market value because allegedly Persaud had never showed the house to prospective buyers and, as an out-of-state resident, Lord relied on Persaud’s representation of the property’s value.

It is further alleged that Jillian Lord attended what she believed was a closing on the property in February 2003 at the Richmond Hill office of her attorney – the defendant Sukhdeo. According to the charges, Persaud knew he had been rejected for a mortgage and was unable to close but that Sukhdeo had agreed to buy the property for himself, fix it up and sell it. At the purported closing, Lord signed all relevant closing documents, including a deed purporting to convey title of the property from Andine Lord to Persaud.

However, a review of the records maintained by the Office of the Register indicated that there was no deed conveying the Richmond Hill property from Lord to Persaud. Instead, Register records only showed the property being transferred from Lord to Ana Zola Colero for a purchase price of \$334,750. According to the charges, Ms. Colero was represented at the closing by the defendant Sukhdeo, Lord’s signature on the deed had allegedly been forged and she never received the nearly \$100,000 difference in sale prices. In addition, a review of Sukhdeo’s account at North Fork Bank revealed that a check was allegedly paid out to Persaud for \$20,000 – even though he did not represent Ms. Colero at the closing or was represented as a broker on any of the closing documents.

Persaud, 36, of 209-26 Whitehall Terrace in Queens Village, was arrested on August 2, 2007, and charged with second-degree grand larceny, first-degree falsifying business records and first-degree scheme to defraud.

The investigation and arrest were conducted by Detective Carolyn Shabunia, of the NYPD’s Special Frauds Squad, under the supervision of Captain Gregory Antonsen, Squad Commander, and the overall supervision of Chief of Detectives George F. Brown.

The District Attorney expressed his appreciation to the New York City Department of Finance for their assistance with the investigation.

Assistant District Attorney Mariana Zelig of the District Attorney’s Economic Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the cases under the supervision of Kristen A. Kane, Chief of the District Attorney’s Elder Fraud Unit, and Gregory C. Pavlides, Economic Crimes Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney Linda M. Cantoni.

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

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