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FIVE JFK PARKING LOT COLLECTORS CHARGED WITH STEALING PARKING FEES

Alleged Scheme Exposed When Computer Showed Hundreds of Cars Entering Lots But Never Exiting

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by Port Authority Police Superintendent Samuel J. Plumeri, Jr., today announced that five employees of Five Star Parking, a Port Authority subcontractor, have been charged with stealing a total of nearly \$7,500 in cash fees paid by motorists at John F. Kennedy Airport's paid public parking lots during the first five months of this year by overriding the airport's computer system. The investigation is continuing and more arrests are expected.

District Attorney Brown said, "According to the allegations, the defendants were under the misguided assumption that public money was easy money. Unfortunately for them, they learned the hard way that the very same computer system that they were allegedly manipulating to skim money from parking lot fees to line their own pockets was also responsible for their downfall. Their alleged conduct represents a complete betrayal of the trust that their employer had in them."

"It is unfortunate that these individuals were charged with violating their duties by stealing from the agency," said Superintendent Plumeri. "It is fortunate, however, that good police work by the agency's detectives and officers led to these arrests. Hopefully, today's actions will send a strong message."

The defendants have been variously charged with fourth-degree grand larceny, petit larceny, first-degree falsifying business records, third-degree computer tampering and computer trespass. If convicted, the defendants face up to either four years or seven years in prison (See Addendum for additional details).

The investigation began earlier this year when the Port Authority and Five Star Parking discovered that, according to their operating systems, hundreds of vehicles were "missing" – in that they had entered an airport parking lot but never exited.

The manner in which the airport's computerized system works is that when a car first enters a parking lot, the driver gets an automated ticket containing information such as the car's license plate number, time, date and lane of entry. At the same time, a photo of the vehicle's license plate is taken. When the vehicle exits the lot, the ticket is placed into an automated reader which generates the fee owed and ultimately purges the vehicle from the computer system after matching up the license plate and other information. A photo of the vehicle's license plate is also taken upon exiting the lot, along with information as to which exit lane and specific toll taker accepted payment.

According to the criminal charges, the defendants exploited a glitch in the system which allowed them to manually override the automated ticket reader system – after a ticket had been swiped by an exiting

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vehicle – and change the vehicle plate numbers and time and date of entry into the lot – thus making it appear that the vehicle was just passing through. Company policy allows a “no charge” for a vehicle that enters a lot but stays less than 15 minutes. However, company policy dictates that manual overrides can only be performed when a supervisor is present.

In carrying out their scheme, it is alleged that the defendants would collect the actual cash payments from exiting vehicles and pocket the cash. However, these incidents of alleged tampering left all of the vehicles which entered under their actual plate number – but exited under a different manually overrode fictitious license plate number – appear, according to the computer system, as never having left the lot.

The defendants were arrested earlier today when they were called in for a purported training seminar to update them on a “new computer system.” They are presently awaiting arraignment in Queens Criminal Court.

Port Authority Police Department Detective John Reilly investigated the case, under the supervision of Detective Lieutenant William Hanley and Inspector Anthony Fitzgerald.

The case is being prosecuted by Catherine C. Kane, Chief of the District Attorney’s Airport Investigations Unit, of the Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau, under the supervision of Gerard A. Brave, Bureau Chief, and Mark L. Katz, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Peter A. Crusco, Executive Assistant District Attorney, Investigations Division, and Linda M. Cantoni, Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney.

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

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Note to Editor: An e-version of this press release is posted on QDA website at www.queensda.org.

ADDENDUM

PATRICIA SCOPE, 26, of 1466 East 100th Street in Brooklyn, is charged with third-degree grand larceny, first-degree falsifying business records, third-degree computer tampering and computer trespass. If convicted, she faces up to seven years in prison.

RALPH RENARD, 29, of 256-22 147th Avenue in Rosedale, Queens is charged with third-degree grand larceny, first-degree falsifying business records, third-degree computer tampering and computer trespass. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison.

PIERRE FRANCOIS, 29, of 498 East 53rd Street in Brooklyn, is charged with first-degree falsifying business records, petit larceny, third-degree computer tampering and computer trespass. If convicted, he faces up to four years in prison.

MARIE MARCELLUS, 36, of 2819 Tilden Avenue in Brooklyn, is charged with first-degree falsifying business records, petit larceny, third-degree computer tampering and computer trespass. If convicted, she faces up to four years in prison.

SIMMONE MANIGAULT, 20, of 432 Wortman Avenue in Brooklyn, is charged with first-degree falsifying business records, petit larceny, third-degree computer tampering and computer trespass. If convicted, she faces up to four years in prison.

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