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Three Plead Guilty to Bank-Fraud Conspiracy

(Alexandria, VA) - Precious Matthews, age 27, of Miami, pled guilty yesterday and Ezenwa Onyedebelu, age 20, and Brandy Anderson, age 30, both of Dallas, pled guilty today to conspiracy to commit bank fraud. Dana J. Boente, Acting United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, Joseph Persichini, Jr., Assistant Director in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington Field Office, Jeffrey W. Irvine, Special Agent in Charge, United States Secret Service, Washington Field Office, and David Baker, Chief of Police, Alexandria Police Department, made the announcement after the pleas were accepted by United States District Judge T.S. Ellis, III.

To date, nine individuals have been arrested as part of this investigation. Those individuals include five people who were indicted by a federal grand jury on September 25,2008: Matthews, Onyedebelu, Anderson, Abel Nnabue, age 33, of Dallas, who pled guilty on October 16, 2008, and Paula Gipson, age 33, of Dallas. The Indictment charges these five defendants with conspiring to commit bank fraud. Sentencing has been set for January 30, 2009 for Nnabue, February 13, 2009 for Matthews, and February 20, 2009 for Onyedebelu, and Anderson. Matthews, Onyedebelu, and Nnabue face a maximum penalty of 30 years in prison, a fine of up to $1,000,000, and up to five years of supervised release. Anderson faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison, a fine of up to $250,000, and up to three years of supervised release.

According to court documents, the defendants and other co-conspirators used fee-based web databases to search for potential victims with large balances in home equity line of credit (HELOC) accounts. This information included name, address, date of birth, and social security number. Once the conspirators identified a victim they used other online databases to obtain information commonly used in security questions, such as the victim's mother's maiden name. The conspirators then obtained credit reports on the victims in order to verify personal information and account balances.

Armed with the victim's personal information, the conspirators called the victim's financial institution, impersonated the victim, and transferred the majority of the available money from the HELOC account into an account from which a wire transfer could be sent. The conspirators would then wire transfer hundreds of thousands of dollars to overseas accounts controlled by members of the conspiracy. The conspirators used

caller-ID spoofing services, prepaid cell phones and PC wireless cards, and transferred victims' home telephone numbers in order to impersonate the victim and avoid identifying themselves.

Once money arrived in a foreign bank, normally in Asia, a money mule who had opened the account for this purpose withdrew the money in cash. The money mule would keep a portion and hand the rest to a courier outside of the bank. The courier would gather several wire transfers from various money mules and crate the money up and send it to the head of the group in Asia. This person would then send wire transfers to various members of the conspiracy, including a $51million wire transfer sent earlier this year.

This case was investigated by the Alexandria Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and United States Secret Service. Assistant United States Attorney John Eisinger and Trial Attorney Tyler Newby from the Department of Justice are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States.

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