

For Immediate Release
August 11, 2011

ZUNI PUEBLO WOMAN SENTENCED TO EIGHT MONTHS IN PRISON
FOR FEDERAL WIRE FRAUD CONVICTION

ALBUQUERQUE – This afternoon in federal court in Albuquerque, **Lynette Esalio**, 35, was sentenced to an eight-month term of imprisonment to be followed by three years of supervised release for her wire fraud conviction. Esalio, a member of the Pueblo of Zuni, also was ordered to pay \$54,227.80 in restitution to the victim of her fraud.

Esalio has been on conditions of release under pretrial supervision since entering a guilty plea to a criminal information charging her with one count of wire fraud on May 11, 2011. Esalio is required to surrender to a federal correctional facility to be designated by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons within 60 days to begin serving her prison sentence.

United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Esalio embezzled \$54,227.90 from her former employer, Halona Plaza in Zuni, New Mexico, over an 18-month period. Court records reflect that Esalio was employed by Halona Plaza from 2004 through October 2009, when she was fired. Halona Plaza is a small family-owned business that sells groceries and lapidary supplies, but also provides financial services, including check cashing, money gram payments and the sale of money orders.

In entering her guilty plea, Esalio admitted that, between January 2008 and July 2009, she purchased 135 money grams on Halona Plaza's account and thus caused Halona Plaza to suffer a loss of \$54,227.80 in fees and costs. Esalio sent the money grams to service providers and creditors to cover her personal expenses, including her satellite TV and credit card bills. Esalio also admitted that she concealed her embezzlement by inflating the cash balance she reported to her employers and by preparing an "off book" adjustment.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and was prosecuted by
Assistant United States Attorney George C. Kraehe.

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