



*United States Attorney
Southern District of New York*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 26, 2008**

**CONTACT: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
YUSILL SCRIBNER
REBEKAH CARMICHAEL
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 637-2600**

**USPIS
AL WEISSMANN
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(212) 330-2270**

**QUEENS COUPLE ARRESTED
IN ALLEGED FAKE INVOICE MASS-MAIL SCAM**

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, and PHIL BARTLETT, Acting Inspector-in-Charge of the New York Office of the Postal Inspection Service, announced the arrests today of MICHAEL SCHLUSSEL and ANA-MARIA SAEGIU for an alleged mail fraud and money laundering scheme in which invoice-style solicitations for fluorescent light bulbs were sent to thousands of companies across the country in an effort to fool the companies into paying for products they had not ordered and did not receive. According to the Complaint filed in Manhattan federal court:

SCHLUSSEL and SAEGIU operated a collections agency called "Alden Curtis and Michaels, Ltd." They were therefore aware that, due to the volume of invoices processed by most businesses, businesses sometimes will pay invoices without verifying that the goods were actually delivered, especially in situations where the invoice is for less than \$1,000. As part of their scam, SCHLUSSEL and SAEGIU mass-mailed thousands of solicitations styled as invoices in the amount of \$995 for fluorescent light bulbs.

SCHLUSSEL and SAEGIU established several shell companies for the purpose of sending the invoice-style solicitations, with return addresses at mailboxes they opened at commercial mail receiving agencies. To avoid using a mail meter that could be traced, the defendants sent the mass mailings with individual stamps. To conceal the control of the funds, the checks were then double-endorsed and cashed into the account of

their collections agency, Alden Curtis and Michaels, Ltd.

Postal regulations require that, on any mailing that "reasonably could be interpreted and construed as a bill, invoice, or statement of account due," a disclaimer must be in "conspicuous boldface capital letters" in a contrasting color and in large typeface which states that "[t]his is a solicitation for the order of goods . . . and not a bill . . . You are under no obligation to make any payments on the account of this offer unless you accept this offer." The bottom of the solicitations sent by the defendants bore language similar to this disclaimer, but it was in small typeface, in black ink, within a paragraph with other information, and was not conspicuous. An example of the invoice-style solicitations is attached to the Complaint.

Several of the mailboxes rented for the scheme were closed by the Postal Service when the mailboxes' renters failed to appear at a hearing.

Over 100 companies that sent checks in response to the invoice-style solicitations confirmed that they did not order light bulbs. Several additional companies, the checks of which were cashed, confirmed that they never received light bulbs after the fact. Companies have sent at least \$700,000 worth of checks as a result of the fraud.

SCHLUSSEL, 55, and SAEGIU, 50, live in Rego Park, New York.

Mr. GARCIA praised the investigative work of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

This case is being prosecuted by the Office's Major Crimes Unit. Assistant United States Attorney HARRY A. CHERNOFF is in charge of the prosecution.

The charges in the Complaint are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

08-073

###