



Department of Justice

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FORMER POLK COUNTY POLICE OFFICER SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON FOR OBSTRUCTING AN UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION

Officer "Tipped Off" Friends Who Were Targets of an Investigation

ROME, GA - MARK HOWELL SPARKS, 40, of Felton, Georgia, was sentenced today by United States District Judge Harold L. Murphy to serve over 2 years in federal prison on charges of obstruction of justice, tampering with a witness and possessing a vehicle with an altered vehicle identification number (VIN).

"Because this defendant was a police officer, he was privy to confidential law enforcement information about an ongoing investigation into 'chop shop' activity in Polk County," said United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates. "During the investigation he encouraged an informant to conceal his friends' involvement in that chop shop activity. Sparks then obstructed the investigation and placed the informant in danger by alerting the targets of the investigation that the informant was recording conversations on behalf of law enforcement officials. Instead of enforcing the law, Sparks broke it, and now he is going to prison."

SPARKS was sentenced to 2 years, 6 months in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to perform 100 hours of community service. SPARKS was convicted of these charges on July 22, 2010, after a four-day trial.

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: In June 2008, while SPARKS was employed as a detective with the Polk County Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Polk County Police Department began a joint investigation into motor vehicle theft and chop shop activity in Polk County. In an effort to protect SPARKS' friends who SPARKS knew were involved in chop shop activity, SPARKS encouraged an informant not to provide information about SPARKS' friends to the agents conducting the investigation. In addition, SPARKS told his friends that the informant was cooperating with law enforcement and was wearing a recording device. SPARKS told his friends that they should not talk to the informant because he was recording conversations. The informant provided much of the detailed information about SPARKS' criminal activity which

expanded the investigation, and the informant testified at length at SPARKS' trial.

After he was arrested, SPARKS admitted that he knowingly drove a pick up truck with an altered vehicle identification number, as the informant had told investigators.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Polk County Police Department, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Polk County Sheriff's Office and the Bartow County Drug Task Force.

Assistant United States Attorney William L. McKinnon, Jr. prosecuted the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.justice.gov/usao/gan.