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**11 INDICTED IN INTERSTATE THEFT AND FENCING RING THAT SOLD
\$2 MILLION IN STOLEN MERCHANDISE VIA eBAY INTERNET AUCTIONS**

CHICAGO – A mother and son who owned three shuttered pawn shops in the Chicago area are among 11 defendants who were indicted today on federal charges for allegedly participating in an interstate theft and fencing operation that sold more than \$2 million in stolen merchandise through thousands of Internet auctions. A federal grand jury returned an 10-count indictment charging the defendants in connection with thefts from retail home improvement stores in at least 11 states, as well as from interstate shipments, and selling the stolen goods at a discount to successful bidders through the eBay Internet auction site. The charges were filed as part of a nationwide crackdown on computer crime, *Operation Cyber Sweep*, that was announced today by the Justice Department, said Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

All 11 defendants were charged with conspiracy to transport stolen property and to receive, possess and dispose of stolen property across state lines. Eight defendants were charged with engaging in a scheme to fraudulently sell stolen property over the Internet and obtain money by stealing items from retail merchants, such as Home Depot, Expo Design Center and The Great Indoors. The pawn shop owners, **Bruce Wasz**, and his mother, **Laura Wasz** allegedly purchased

the stolen property from some of their co-schemers, paying them between 30 and 40 percent of the retail value. Between September 2001 and June 2003, the Waszes, posing as honest sellers, sold the stolen goods – with a combined retail value exceeding \$2 million – in thousands of separate auctions through eBay accounts they controlled. The indictment seeks forfeiture of \$2 million in alleged fraud proceeds from Bruce Wasz and Laura Wasz.

Bruce Wasz was the owner and operator of the Cash Exchange One pawn shop, located at 20 South Pulaski, Chicago, and the Cash Exchange Two, 3147 Cermak, Chicago. Laura Wasz was the owner of the Gold Rush pawn shop at 1719 North Mannheim in Stone Park, where defendant **Michael Hockins** was an employee since at least June 2002.

Among the Home Depot store locations where the defendants allegedly stole goods in the Chicago area were Joliet, Downers Grove, Darien, Woodridge, Palatine, Vernon Hills, McHenry, Northbrook and Crystal Lake. Later, they allegedly traveled to Colorado, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin to steal merchandise valued at more than \$5,000 during each trip, according to the indictment.

Mr. Fitzgerald announced the charges with Thomas J. Kneir, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; Anita L. Davidson, Inspector-in-Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in Chicago; and Supt. Phil Cline of the Chicago Police Department. The officials commended local law enforcement agencies in the 11 states and the Tri-County (Will, Kankakee and Grundy counties) Auto Theft Task Force for assisting the investigation. They also praised the cooperation of Home Depot, The Great Indoors, eBay and PayPal. The investigation is continuing, they said.

“Law enforcement is adapting to investigate and prosecute crime in the technological age,” Mr. Fitzgerald said. “The crimes charged today are replicas of traditional theft and fencing operations, with the new twist of using the Internet to cloak and facilitate criminal activity. These charges are an example of effective cybercrime enforcement.”

Mr. Kneir said: “The charges announced today demonstrate the capability of criminals to adapt current technologies for illicit purposes; in this case, to facilitate the commission of otherwise traditional crimes and help conceal their identity from law enforcement. Uncovering and investigating this type of crime will be the challenge for law enforcement in the years to come.”

The defendants and the charges against each are as follows:

Bruce Wasz, 32, of Addison, one count each of wire fraud, mail fraud, and interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy and receiving stolen property;

Laura Wasz, 51, Wood Dale, three counts of wire fraud, two counts of receiving stolen property and one count each of mail fraud and interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy;

Michael Hockins, 30, of River Grove, three counts of wire fraud, two counts of receiving stolen property and one count each of mail fraud and interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy;

Daniel Bonaguidi, 41, of Romeoville, three counts of wire fraud, two counts of mail fraud, and one count of interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy;

Peter Giannopoulos, 39, of Greenfield, Wi., three counts of wire fraud, two counts of mail fraud, and one count of interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy;

Robert Savino, 33, of Chicago, three counts of wire fraud, two counts of mail fraud, and one count of interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy;

Jason Wolber, 25, of Wheeling, interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy;

Spyros Arvanitakis, 35, of Worth, three counts of wire fraud, two counts of mail fraud, and one count each of interstate transportation of stolen property and conspiracy;

Kim Marx, 37, of Greenfield, Wi., three counts of wire fraud, two counts of mail fraud, and one count of interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy;

Robert Cicero, 45, of Schiller Park, interstate transportation of stolen property and conspiracy; and

George Lukaszewski, 42, of Schaumburg, interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy.

All 11 defendants will be arraigned at a later date in U.S. District Court in Chicago.

As part of the fraud scheme, the indictment alleges that the Waszes recruited Bonaguidi, Giannopoulos, Savino, Wolber, Arvanitakis and Marx to steal merchandise and identified specific products for them to steal, such as sump pumps, faucets, mosquito exterminators, kitchen appliances, garage door openers, pressure washers, tank-less water heaters, chainsaws, snow blowers and tools. The Waszes removed and caused others to remove price tags and other markings that would have identified the retail merchants that were the true owners of the stolen property that they offered for sale on eBay. Using various accounts they controlled, including under the names “amolaur,” “beewasz,” “goldrush,” “gooddeal1010,” and “sellya1,” the Waszes sold property they knew was stolen while concealing, and not disclosing, that information to the purchasers. Their eBay auction solicitations falsely represented that they were “honest” sellers who could lawfully sell their goods, the indictment alleges.

According to court documents, in February 2003, a tractor-trailer containing Echo brand chainsaws valued at approximately \$300,000 was stolen in Illinois while en route from Japan to a company in Lake Zurich where further assembly was to be completed with the installation of bars and chains. Within a few weeks of the theft, eBay seller “amolaur,” identified as Laura Wasz, offered the Echo model chainsaws “without bar and chain.” In March 2003, an undercover law

enforcement official purchased such a chainsaw new and in the box for \$215.01, which is less than the wholesale price paid by Home Depot, where the item's retail price is approximately \$329.

In April 2003, an undercover officer purchased a "Basement Watchdog Brand New! Sump Pump!!!" from eBay vendor "amolaur" with a bid of \$266.45, plus a \$35 shipping charge and no sales tax. The sump pump's retail price is approximately \$469. Between December 2001 and February 2003, the Waszes, using various eBay accounts, sold 127 of the same sump pumps for an average price of approximately \$214, according to court documents.

As part of the fraud scheme, the Waszes and Hockins allegedly maintained false business records pertaining to their stolen inventory, including invoices with the names of fictitious companies and documents that did not represent the true identities of the sellers of the stolen goods that they had purchased. The Waszes stored stolen property at Laura Wasz's residence, the pawn shops and in storage facilities in Franklin Park and Elmhurst, the indictment alleges. Search warrants executed at several Chicago area locations in June resulted in the recovery of approximately \$200,000 worth of stolen merchandise.

The interstate transportation of stolen property conspiracy count alleges that the Waszes paid eight of their co-defendants in cash for the merchandise that they stole and, in some instances, advanced them funds to finance their out-of-state theft trips. The eight defendants who allegedly stole from retailers shared intelligence information, such as security measures and whether they had recently stolen from specific merchants or traveled to particular geographic areas, according to the indictment.

Anyone who believes that they have purchased stolen property can file a report online with the FBI at www.ifccfbi.gov. Anyone seeking to recover stolen property should contact the FBI by e-mail at citac.chicago@fbi.gov.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Brian Hayes and Michelle Nasser Weiss.

If convicted, the defendants face the following maximum penalties on each count in which they were charged: interstate transportation of stolen property and receipt or possession of stolen property – 10 years in prison; conspiracy, mail fraud and wire fraud – 20 years in prison; and each count carries maximum fine of \$250,000. The Court also must order restitution, and it would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed under the United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The public is reminded that an indictment contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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