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March 24, 2006

**LOVES PARK MAN SENTENCED TO 27 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON
FOR THE ARMED ROBBERY OF A MACHESNEY PARK GAS STATION**

ROCKFORD -- PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; W. LARRY FORD, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, & Explosives; LARRY G. TRENT, Director of the Illinois State Police; PAUL A. LOGLI, Winnebago County State's Attorney; RICHARD MEYERS, Winnebago County Sheriff; DOMINIC IASPARRO, Acting Chief of the Rockford Police Department; and PATRICK CARRIGAN, Chief of the Loves Park Police Department, today made the following announcement:

Today, United States District Judge Philip G. Reinhard sentenced **ROBERT A. HAWKINS**, 49 (DOB: 02/20/57), formerly of 5915 Parkside, Loves Park, Illinois, to 27 years in federal prison, without parole, for the robbery of the Road Ranger Gas Station located at 10114 North Second Street, Machesney Park, shortly after midnight on March 15, 2004, and for using a firearm in furtherance of the robbery and being a felon in possession of a firearm.

Hawkins, having five prior felony convictions, including armed robbery, robbery, aggravated assault, and burglary, and was sentenced as an "armed career criminal" under a federal firearms law which mandates a non-paroleable sentence of at least 15 years of imprisonment for persons with extensive records of prior convictions who illegally possess firearms. The court also ordered Hawkins to pay a \$300 special assessment and further sentenced Hawkins to 5 years of supervised release following his release from prison.

Hawkins was found guilty of the charges on December 8, 2005, following a four-day jury trial in federal court in Rockford. Hawkins was arrested for the robbery by officers from the Winnebago County Sheriff's Department and Loves Park Police shortly after the robbery occurred on March 15, 2004, and had been indicted for that crime on May 5, 2004. Hawkins was charged in the indictment with one count of armed robbery of the Road Ranger gas station in interference with interstate commerce, one count of using a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence, and one count of possessing a firearm as a convicted felon and an armed career criminal. Hawkins has been in custody since his arrest.

First charged by the Winnebago County States Attorney's Office under state law, Hawkins was transferred to federal court where he was charged under tough federal firearms laws as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an intensive, cooperative effort between local, state, and federal law enforcement to attack gun crimes. The cornerstone of the program is that every state defendant possessing a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution in order to obtain the harshest penalties for the worst offenders. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov.

The case was investigated by the Winnebago County Sheriff's Police and the Rockford office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, & Explosives with the assistance of the Illinois State Police, the Rockford Police Department, and the Loves Park Police Department.

The case is being prosecuted in United States District Court in Rockford by Assistant United States Attorneys Joseph C. Pedersen and Scott A. Verseman.

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