



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**



News Release

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Cottage Grove man convicted of stealing identities, obtaining more than \$150,000 from victims

Earlier today, a federal jury in Minneapolis convicted a 40-year-old Cottage Grove man of using the names and personal identification information of others to obtain fraudulent checks for more than \$150,000 which he deposited into his bank account. Jason Elliott Clark was convicted of two counts of bank fraud, one count of bank fraud conspiracy, one count of identity theft, and one count of aggravated identity theft. Clark was indicted, along with two co-defendants, on September 15, 2010.

The evidence presented at trial proved that between March of 2007 and August of 2008, Clark conspired with others to obtain bank funds from the accounts of third parties without their knowledge by creating counterfeit checks that included stolen bank routing numbers and account numbers. They also used the name and personal information of another person with intent to commit bank fraud and access device fraud.

Shortly before the trial began, Clark's co-defendants pleaded guilty for their roles in the conspiracy. On February 10, 2011, Jason Richard Hansen, age 32, of Crystal, pleaded guilty to one count of bank fraud conspiracy, one count of bank fraud, one count of access device fraud, and one count of aggravated identity theft. On February 17, 2010, Nou Thao, age 33, of Maplewood, pleaded guilty to one count of bank fraud conspiracy.

Thao and Hansen's respective plea agreements state that from March of 2007 through August of 2008, they conspired with another man to commit bank and access device fraud. In 2009, that man, Marcus Kwamena Benson, age 39, of Maplewood, was convicted and sentenced for taking more than \$483,000 from the accounts of others at various financial institutions.

Hansen worked for a mortgage loan subsidiary company and had access to the personal identification and financial information of people who applied for mortgage loans. He admittedly stole that information in order to create fraudulent checks and obtain cash. Thao admitted acquiring checks containing stolen information and depositing those checks into her bank account in order to obtain cash. In addition, she allowed her bank account to be used during the conspiracy to deposit wire transfers from the bank accounts of the conspiracy victims.

All three defendants in this case face a potential maximum penalty of 30 years in prison on the conspiracy charge. In addition, Clark and Hansen face a potential maximum penalty of 30 years on each bank fraud count and a mandatory minimum of two years on the aggravated identity theft charge. Clark also faces 15 years for identity theft, while Hansen faces ten years for access device fraud. United States District Court Judge David S. Doty will determine their sentences at a future hearing, yet to be scheduled.

This case is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (“USPIS”), the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, U.S. Homeland Security-Investigations, and the Minnesota State Patrol. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys LeeAnn K. Bell and Lola Velazquez-Aguilu.

This law enforcement action is in part sponsored by the interagency Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force. The task force was established to wage an aggressive, coordinated and proactive effort to investigate and prosecute financial crimes. It includes representatives from a broad range of federal agencies, regulatory authorities, inspectors general, and state and local law enforcement who, working together, bring to bear a powerful array of criminal and civil enforcement resources. The task force is working to improve efforts across the federal executive branch and, with state and local partners, investigate and prosecute significant financial crimes, ensure just and effective punishment for those who perpetrate financial crimes, combat discrimination in the lending and financial markets, and recover proceeds for victims of financial crimes.

The USPIS and the Minnesota U.S. Attorney’s Office remind people to protect themselves from identity theft. For more information, visit

<http://www.justice.gov/criminal/fraud/websites/idtheft.html>

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