

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Two Staten Island Men Charged with Loansharking;
One Also Charged with Arson of Ex-Employee's Mercedes

(More)

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NEWARK – Two Staten Island men were named in an Indictment unsealed today, charging them with loansharking. The Indictment also charges one of the defendants with the arson of a former employee's Mercedes-Benz in Ocean County in 2004, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr.

Francis Alfieri, 31, was arrested this morning by Special Agents of the FBI and the IRS Criminal Investigation Division. James V. LaForte, Jr., 32, is currently incarcerated in New York on unrelated charges.

Alfieri was scheduled to appear at 2:30 p.m. today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Esther Salas for an initial appearance.

According to the Indictment, LaForte, Alfieri, and another individual, identified as co-conspirator one, conspired to give high-interest loans to debtors and used violence and threats of violence to collect on the loans. The Indictment further alleges that loan payments were often collected by a co-conspirator, who is not specifically identified in the Indictment.

According to the Indictment, in mid-2004, LaForte and Alfieri gave a \$3,000 loan to one particular debtor who was required to pay approximately \$120 in interest per week. In about late 2004, the Indictment alleges that LaForte and Alfieri gave a second \$4,000 loan to the same debtor and required him to pay approximately \$150 in interest per week. According to the Indictment, the weekly interest payments made on both loans did not reduce the principal balance of the loans.

The Indictment further alleges that in about late 2004, defendant Alfieri threatened to break the debtor's legs if he failed to repay the \$4,000 loan. In addition, the Indictment alleges that on Dec. 17, 2004, in Edison, the co-conspirator collected a \$300 check from the debtor on the \$4,000 loan. While collecting the payment, and at LaForte's direction, the Indictment alleges that the co-conspirator assaulted the debtor by smacking him across the face with an open hand. On about Jan. 14, 2005, the \$300 check was cashed against a bank account controlled by LaForte and Alfieri.

The loansharking conspiracy (Count One) and loansharking violation (Count Two) each carry a maximum statutory prison sentence of 20 years and a \$250,000 fine.

Counts Three through Five charge LaForte with destroying a car by arson as an act of revenge against a former employee of LaForte's real estate title company, Richmond Abstract. According to the Indictment, on about June 23, 2004, LaForte directed the co-conspirator and another individual to travel from Staten Island to Ocean County for the purpose of setting fire to this former employee's car. According to the Indictment, at LaForte's direction, the co-conspirator poured gasoline on two cars parked in the

driveway of this former employee's home and ignited the gasoline, causing a 2003 Mercedes-Benz to be completely destroyed.

Count Three charges LaForte with conspiracy to travel in interstate commerce in aid of a racketeering enterprise, which carries a maximum statutory prison term of five years and a \$250,000 fine. Count Four charges LaForte with travel in interstate commerce in aid of a racketeering enterprise, which carries a maximum statutory prison sentence of 20 years and a \$250,000 fine. Count Five charges LaForte with malicious destruction of a vehicle by means of fire, which carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years, a maximum statutory prison sentence of 20 years, and a \$250,000 fine.

An Indictment is merely an accusation. Despite Indictment, every defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Anthony Moscato of the U.S. Attorney Office's Strike Force unit in Newark.

Marra credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, and Special Agents of the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord, with the investigation leading to the Indictment.

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