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HURRICANE COUPLE SENTENCED FOR THEFT OF GOVERNMENT BENEFITS

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. – A Putnam County couple was sentenced today by United States District Judge Robert C. Chambers for the theft of government money. Donna, 54, and husband, Randall Fizer, 54, of Hurricane, Putnam County, West Virginia, both received three months of home confinement and five years of probation for the offense. An investigation revealed that Donna Fizer had a relative who was receiving benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”). Upon the death of Fizer’s relative, the couple admitted to continuing to receive and cash the VA benefit checks that were issued to the deceased family member. Using the “Nationwide Death Match Project,” investigators learned that the couple unlawfully received benefits from May 2008 until January 2010. Investigators confronted the defendants in July of 2010, and both admitted their guilt. The Fizers were ordered to pay back \$30,540 in government funds.

The investigation was conducted by the Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General and the United States Secret Service. Assistant United States Attorney Erik Goes handled the prosecution.

This case was prosecuted as part of the U.S. Attorney's Initiative to Combat Theft of Government Benefits launched in June 2008. The Initiative is designed to protect public funds and to prosecute those who steal benefits from public programs or agencies such as the Railroad Retirement Board, US Veterans Administration, Social Security Administration, and the Department of Labor.

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PENNSYLVANIA MAN SENTENCED TO PRISON ON FEDERAL DRUG CHARGES

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. – Byfield Adolph Blake, 41, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was sentenced to 37 months in prison today by United States District Judge John T. Copenhaver Jr., on federal drug charges. Blake pleaded guilty in November 2010 to possession with intent to distribute a quantity of marijuana for remuneration. On or about July 31, 2006, members of the United States Marshals Service and the Kanawha County Sheriff’s Office task force arrested Blake at a Jefferson Avenue apartment in St. Albans, on a fugitive warrant issued by the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas. During the arrest, task force officers observed marijuana in plain view and notified members of the Metropolitan Drug Enforcement Network Team (MDENT). MDENT obtained a search warrant and executed a search of the defendant’s apartment. Upon executing the search warrant, investigators located and seized several items including 13 pounds of marijuana, approximately \$11,119 cash, and three firearms. Blake was returned to the custody of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to serve his remaining term of incarceration. In August 2010, Blake made an appearance in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia for prosecution for charges arising from the events of July 2006.

This case was investigated by the Kanawha County Sheriff's Office, Metropolitan Drug Enforcement Network Team (MDENT), and the Cops United Felony Fugitive Enforcement Division (CUFFED) Task Force. Assistant United States Attorney Josh Hanks handled the prosecution.

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CABELL COUNTY MAN SENTENCED TO PRISON ON FIREARMS THEFT CHARGE

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. – James A. Thompson, 22, of Culloden, Cabell County, West Virginia was sentenced to 30 months in prison by United States District Judge Robert C. Chambers for aiding and abetting other known individuals in the theft of firearms from Johnny's Gun and Pawn. Thompson pleaded guilty in October 2010, admitting that on May 24, 2009, he waited outside Johnny's Gun and Pawn, a federal firearms licensee located in Culloden, West Virginia, while two known individuals broke into the business and stole nine firearms. After the theft, Thompson placed six of the stolen firearms in a pillow case and took them to a residence in Culloden. The stolen firearms have been recovered. The nine firearms traveled in interstate commerce prior to being stolen.

This case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Cabell County Sheriff's Department, Huntington Police Department, the West Virginia State Police and Putnam County Sheriff's Department. Assistant United States Attorney Lisa Johnston handled the prosecution.

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