



RICHARD A. BROWN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY
QUEENS COUNTY
125-01 QUEENS BOULEVARD
KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK 11415-1568
718-286-6000**

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CONTACT: KEVIN RYAN
NICOLE NAVAS
MERIS CAMPBELL
(718) 286-6315

**D.A. BROWN: COLLEGE POINT WOMAN CHARGED UNDER NEW YORK'S
HATE CRIME STATUTE WITH SCHEME TO DEFRAUD TWO ELDERLY
WOMEN OUT OF \$245,000**

Allegedly Used Money to Buy Auto and Rhode Island Property and Start Carrot Cake Business

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a College Point woman has been charged under New York State's Hate Crime Law with stealing more than \$245,000 in savings from a 90-year-old and a 94-year-old woman during a one-year period between 2004 and 2005.

District Attorney Brown said, "Under the provisions of New York State's Hate Crimes Act of 2000, enhanced charges can be filed when a defendant commits a larceny and selects his or her victim because of their age which is defined as being 60 years of age or older. Crimes against the elderly – whether they involve physical or, as in this case, financial harm – are despicable because the victims are so lonely and vulnerable."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Patricia Murtaugh, 57, of 40-25 College Point Boulevard in College Point, Queens. She was arraigned yesterday in Queens Criminal Court before Queens Criminal Court Judge William Harrington on charges of Grand Larceny in the Second Degree as a Hate Crime, Grand Larceny in the Second Degree and Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree. Judge Harrington set bail at \$200,000 and a return date of July 21, 2006. If convicted, she faces up to 25 years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, the defendant was hired by 90-year-old Joan Coughlan, of Manhattan, to assist her in cataloging and filing her deceased brother's possessions. At the time, Coughlan had three accounts at The Emigrant Savings Bank with amounts totaling more than \$300,000. It is alleged that, between December 16, 2004 and March 3, 2005, three checks totaling \$9,400 were drawn on these accounts and made payable to the defendant. It is further alleged that on March 18, 2005, the defendant – without the knowledge or permission of Ms. Coughlan – opened up a joint account at a Chase Manhattan Bank in Queens in both their names and that between March 18, 2005, and August 12, 2005, and transferred more than \$150,000 from Coughlan's Emigrant accounts to the joint Chase account. Thereafter, the defendant is alleged to have withdrawn the entire transferred amount from the Chase account by way of cashier checks, personal checks, teller withdrawals and debit purchases made on the account.

The District Attorney said that the defendant is further charged with befriending 94-year-old Elizabeth Shanks of the Bronx and offering to assist her with paying her bills and that in order to make it easier for the defendant to help her, she obtained from the victim a power of attorney. It is further alleged that on May 4, 2005 – unbeknownst to Ms. Shanks and without her permission – the defendant opened up a joint account at a Queens Chase Manhattan Bank Branch in both their names. Five days later, on May 10, 2005, the defendant allegedly transferred approximately \$137,000 from Shanks' Citibank account – again without Shanks' knowledge or permission – to the Chase account and thereafter withdrew \$85,000 from the Chase account by means of cashier checks, personal checks, teller withdrawals and wire transfers.

The District Attorney said that based on a review of subpoenaed records it appears that the defendant used some of the money to purchase a Ford automobile, pay rent on her apartment, make a down payment on a house on Block Island in Rhode Island and open a carrot cake business on Block Island.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Evelyn Alegre and Ketty Larco of the District Attorney's Detective Squad under the supervision of Sergeant John Kenna Lieutenant Robert Burke and the overall supervision of Chief Lawrence J. Festa and Deputy Chief Albert D. Velardi, with the assistance of Laurie Woods of the District Attorney's Elder Abuse Project and Senior Forensic Accountant James Dever of the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Gregory C. Pavlides, Chief of District Attorney Brown's Economic Crimes Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Assistant District Attorney Linda M. Cantoni, Counsel to the Investigations Division.

It should be noted that a criminal charge is merely an accusation and that the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org.