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**D.A. BROWN: THREE EMPLOYEES OF MASPETH RADIO SHACK STORE
CHARGED IN IDENTITY FRAUD SCHEME**

Allegedly Opened 21 Credit Accounts and Made \$23,000 In Electronics Purchases

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that three Ridgewood residents formerly employed at a Radio Shack store in Maspeth, Queens, have been charged with stealing the identities of 21 individuals which were used to fraudulently open up Radio Shack credit accounts and purchase more than \$23,000 in electronics merchandise. The victims whose identities were allegedly stolen reside in New York State, with many residing in the Bronx, and others residing in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

District Attorney Brown said, "Identity theft is a serious and growing problem that destroys the credit ratings and reputations of its victims. In this case it is alleged that the victims did not learn that they had been scammed until Radio Shack innocently went after them for being delinquent in making payments. The defendants' arrests have put an end to their alleged scheme and the ongoing investigation is expected to result in additional arrests."

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Edward Bermudez, 20, of 55-72 61st Street, Daniel Altaro, 20, of 1914 Gates Ave and Wuilvert Diaz, 20, of 72-04 Juniper Valley Road. All three defendants were formerly employed as sales associates at the Radio Shack store located at 7001 Grand Avenue in Maspeth, Queens.

The three defendants are presently being held pending arraignment in Queens Criminal Court in Kew Gardens on charges of Identity Theft in the First Degree, Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, Criminal Possession of Stolen Property in the Third Degree, Forgery in the Second Degree, Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree and Unlawful Possession of Personal Identification Information in the Third Degree. If convicted, they each face up to seven years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the criminal complaint, between May 1, 2005 and December 31, 2005, the three defendants engaged in a systematic scheme to steal the personal identifying information – name, address and social security number – of 21 individuals in order to open up Radio Shack credit accounts in their names. Once the credit card applications – purportedly signed by the account holder – were approved, the defendants then allegedly used the credit accounts to purchase more than \$23,000 in store merchandise – including computers, IPODs, cameras and flat screen monitors. In carrying out their scheme, it is alleged that one defendant would open an account and a second or third defendant would process sales using that account.

The District Attorney said that the complaint additionally charges that the defendant Bermudez admitted that he was provided information by two men who repeatedly came into the store and whom he had met approximately two weeks after he began work there in June 2005. It is alleged that the two men initially had questionable identification but Bermudez allowed them to receive credit and purchase merchandise on credit. According to the complaint, Bermudez further admitted that he subsequently allowed the two men to open 20 to 30 new accounts under different names – each for between \$500 and \$2000 in credit – and that he processed approximately \$40,000 worth of sales with these accounts.

The complaint further charges that the defendant Altaro admitted that he was working in the store in December 2005 when two men came into the store and spoke to the defendant Bermudez about opening fraudulent accounts. The two men then allegedly handed a piece of paper containing information to the three defendants and that Altaro used the information – which appeared to be a cell phone application – to open a Radio Shack credit card account. According to the complaint, Altaro further admitted that he processed two accounts and that one of the sales transactions involved a computer, a cell phone and two cameras.

District Attorney Brown noted that Radio Shack has reversed all the charges on the 21 accounts allegedly opened by the defendant due to the fraud.

The investigation was conducted by Valerie Frazier, Loss Prevention Manager for Radio Shack, Citibank Investigator Luis Bauza, New York City Police Department Detective David Chaffee of the NYPD's 50th Precinct, and Assistant District Attorney Allison P. Wright of the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau.

Assistant District Attorney Wright is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney Linda M. Cantoni.

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

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