



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

RICHARD A. BROWN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT: KEVIN RYAN
HELEN PETERSON
(718)286-6315

D.A. BROWN: QUEENS APARTMENT ROOMMATES
CHARGED WITH STEALING IDENTITIES OF FORMER TENANTS

Allegedly Opened Credit Card Accounts In Former Tenants' Names and Ran Up Nearly \$70,000 in Bills

_____ Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that two women sharing a Rego Park apartment have been charged with assuming the identities of the previous tenants – a married couple – and opening approximately 19 credit card accounts in their names and making nearly \$70,000 in unauthorized purchases.

District Attorney Brown said, “The defendants are accused of not only taking over their victims’ old apartment but are accused of assuming their identities, as well. Unraveling the financial damage caused by the defendants’ alleged fraud could take the victims months or even years to reestablish their good credit.”

The District Attorney identified the defendants as Consuelo Hernandez, 44, and Rhina E. Landaverde, both of 65-74 Saunders Street in Queens. The defendants, who are presently awaiting arraignment in Queens Criminal Court in Kew Gardens, are charged with second- and third-degree grand larceny, second-degree forgery, second-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument and first-degree identity theft. If convicted, they each face up to fifteen years in prison.

District Attorney Brown said that, according to the charges, Katia Shpilberg (nee Tseitlin) and her husband, Yaniv Shpilberg, vacated their Saunders Street apartment in Rego Park on August 24, 2006. Mrs. Shpilberg executed a change of address form with the U.S. Postal Service so that the couple’s mail would be forwarded from the Saunders Street address to their new residence in Central New Jersey. Nearly a year later, on May 4, 2007, the Postal Service received via its website a change of address form allegedly from the Shpilbergs, indicating that they wanted their mail forwarded from their New Jersey address back to their former Rego Park address. Having discovered that her address had been changed without her knowledge or permission, Mrs. Shpilberg reversed the change of address to ensure that her mail would once again be delivered to her current New Jersey address. However, on June 10, 2008, the Postal Service once again received a request – which the Shpilbergs had not executed – to have the couple’s mail forwarded to their former Queens address.

An investigation was commenced by the Port Authority Police Department and the United States Postal Service which allegedly uncovered that between January 2007 and June 2008 various unauthorized credit card accounts – including MasterCard, American Express, Bank of America and Citibank – were opened either in the name of Katia Tseitlin or Yaniv Shpilberg and which listed the Saunders Street address as the accounts’ billing and mailing address. The outstanding balances on

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the accounts – which range from a low of \$8,000 to more than \$30,000 – total nearly \$70,000, and allegedly include the purchase of a number of airline tickets in the names of the defendants Hernandez and Landaverde and the one dollar fees for the change of address requests. In addition, it is alleged that the name “Rhina Pagan” was added as an authorized user on the American Express account bearing the name Katia Tseitlin.

District Attorney Brown said that on Thursday, June 25, 2008, a court-authorized search warrant signed by Queens County Criminal Court Judge Ira Margulis was executed on the Saunders Street apartment. Among the items allegedly seized were numerous credit cards bearing the names and forged signatures of Katia Tseitlin, Katha Shpilberg and Yaniv Shpilberg, as well as forged New York State identification cards bearing photographs of the defendant Landaverde with the names and purported signatures of Katia A. Tseitlin and Rhina Pagan. Also allegedly recovered was mail addressed to the Shpilbergs and numerous charge receipts for items purchased using the unauthorized accounts.

At the time of their arrests, Landaverde allegedly admitted to executing the Postal Service change of addresses and signing the Shpilbergs’ names, as well as having applied for credit cards in the names of the Shpilbergs and using the cards to make purchases. Hernandez allegedly admitted that she knew that credit cards in the name of Katia Tseitlin had been applied for and were being used, and that minimal payments were being made on the cards and that the balances on the cards were not going to be paid in full.

The investigation was conducted by Detective John Reilly, of the Port Authority Police Department, under the supervision of Sergeant Barbara Hein, Lieutenant Bill Hanley and the overall supervision of Inspector Anthony Fitzgerald, and by Postal Inspectors Frank Rodriguez and Mike Giannone, of the United States Postal Service, under the supervision of Team Leader Ralph Franzese, Assistant Inspector-In-Charge Phillip Bartlett and the overall supervision of Inspector-In-Charge for the New York Division Ronald J. Verrochio.

Assistant District Attorney Lauren D. Steele, of the District Attorney’s Economic and Environmental Crimes Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Peter A. Crusco, Executive Assistant District Attorney, Investigations Division, and Linda M. Cantoni, Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney.

It should be noted that a criminal 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.