



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

Release # 108-2018
www.queensda.org
twitter@QueensDABrown

RICHARD A. BROWN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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CONTACT: QDA PRESS (718)286-6315
QDACommunications@queensda.org
NYDFS PRESS 212 709-1691
Public-affairs@dfs.ny.gov

**TRIO CHARGED WITH STEALING, PLUNDERING AND SELLING VAN PARTS
IN ELABORATE CONSPIRACY SCHEME**

*Defendants Focused on Swiping Econoline Vans And Similar Vehicles From Streets
And Stripping Autos From Bumper to Bumper And From Rooftop to Tires;
Leader of Crew Allegedly Stated in Call He Was "About to Go Shopping for Vans and Parts;"
Second Crew Charged With Insurance Fraud For Staging Collisions*

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announce that three people have been charged with conspiracy, grand larceny and other crimes for carrying out an elaborate scheme to steal Econoline vans, stripping them for parts and then selling the stolen loot - everything from tires to seats to bumpers, radios and rooftops. The trio is accused of cruising areas throughout Queens County and occasionally dipping into parts of Nassau County to steal vans between July 2017, and February 2018.

District Attorney Brown said in regards to the stolen vans arrests, "The defendants in this case turned an illegal venture into a dedicated job. They lurked in the middle of the night or early hours of the morning allegedly stealing vans, arranging meets to sell parts and even quoted prices - \$100 for seats, \$120 for radios. A long-term, detailed investigation uncovered this scheme that has now been shut down. The defendants face serious prison time for their goal of enriching themselves at the expense of others."

District Attorney Brown, joined by the New York State Department of Financial Services Superintendent Maria T. Vullo, additionally announce the dismantling of an insurance fraud crew that faked car crashes to bilk insurance companies out of cash.

In this case, which includes two defendants charged in the van conspiracy case, a total of four individuals are charged with insurance fraud and other crimes for faking car collisions to collect cash for phoney injuries.

District Attorney Brown said, "Every time a faked car crash insurance payment is doled out, everyone else pays too - in higher premiums. These kinds of plots to defraud will not be tolerated in Queens County. The culprits have been caught and now face incarceration."

Superintendent Vullo said, "These defendants engineered a scheme to fraudulently enrich themselves at the cost of higher premiums for hardworking taxpayers. As regulator of New York's insurance industry, the Department of Financial Services is proud to have assisted the Queens District Attorney's Office in bringing these defendants to justice."

The District Attorney identified the main defendant in the plots to steal vans and stage car crashes as Chukuweike Emeni (aka Emzie Snipes), 35, of Far Rockaway, Queens. Emeni was arraigned last night before Queens Criminal Court Judge Eugene Guarino on multiple complaints charging him with third- and fourth-degree grand larceny, third- and fourth-degree criminal possession of stolen property, fifth-degree conspiracy, third-degree insurance fraud, third-degree attempted grand larceny and first-degree falsifying business records. Judge Guarino set bail at \$210,000 for all cases and ordered the defendant to return to court on July 10, 2018. If convicted, Emeni faces up to seven years in prison.

District Attorney Brown identified the other defendants in the plot to steal vans case as Teyana Paul, 22, of Rosedale, Queens, and Mark Thomas, 24, of Amsterdam in upstate New York. Paul and Thomas were arraigned on June 6, 2018, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Toni Cimino on various charges including third-degree grand larceny, third-degree criminal possession of stolen

(MORE)

property and fifth-degree conspiracy. Judge Cimino set bail at \$50,000 for Thomas and ordered supervised release for Paul. The return date for Thomas and Paul was today. If convicted the defendants face up to seven years in prison. **(See Addendum Below for defendants in the insurance fraud case).**

According to the charges, said District Attorney Brown, between July 2017, and February 2018, on at least a dozen occasions either all three defendants or just two would go to various locations in Queens and Long Island, take an Econoline van from the street or a parking lot and drive away with it. On August 1, 2017, defendant Emeni was seen on video surveillance taking a 2016 white Ford minibus from the Samuel Field YMCA parking lot on Little Neck Parkway. The vehicle was recovered on August 21, 2017, on Horace Harding Expressway missing the front bumper and headlights.

The District Attorney added, according to the complaints, that Econoline vans disappeared from Little Neck, East Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, Flushing and Kew Gardens in Queens as well as from the streets of Freeport, Rockville Centre and Long Beach in Long Island. The vehicles were recovered throughout Queens County stripped of various parts, including seats, headlights, the rooftop, bumpers, tires, tail lights, radios, side panels and other items.

According to the charges, said District Attorney Brown, law enforcement using court-authorized eavesdropping tools overheard numerous conversations where defendant Emeni told buyers when he had seats available at \$100 each, a car battery priced at \$70 and four tires selling for \$350. Cell phone records in many instances placed the defendants in the area where the vehicles were stolen and where they were recovered. Video surveillance also allegedly placed the defendants at the scene and in many instances defendant Paul could be seen in her silver Toyota Highlander following behind the stolen van.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives William Rein and Richard Straus, of the New York City Police Department's Criminal Enterprise Division and the Auto Crime Unit-Mayor Case, under the supervision of Sergeant Greg Vallerugo and Lieutenant Christopher Gately and under the overall supervision of Deputy Inspector Robert LaPollo, Commanding Officer of the Auto Crime Unit, and Chief Christopher McCormack, of the Criminal Enterprise Division and Chief of Detectives Dermot Shea. Assisting in the insurance fraud investigation were Investigators Hugh Brickley and Gerard Callahan of the New York State Department of Financial Services Insurance Fraud Bureau, under the supervision of Deputy Director Angelo Carbone and Director Frank Orlando.

Assistant District Attorney Jamie-Lynn Burns, of District Attorney Brown's, Organized Crime and Rackets Bureau, is prosecuting the cases under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gerard A. Brave, Bureau Chief, Mary M. Lowenburg and Catherine C. Kane, Deputy Bureau Chiefs, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco.

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

ADDENDUM

Darnell Johnson, 29, of Queens, is charged with third-degree insurance fraud, third-degree attempted grand larceny, first-degree falsifying business records and fifth-degree conspiracy. The defendant was arraigned on June 6, 2018, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Scott Dunn, who ordered the defendant held on \$15,000 bail. His next court date was today. If convicted Johnson faces up to seven years in prison.

Nadine Paul, 29, of Rosedale, Queens, is charged with third-degree insurance fraud, third-degree attempted grand larceny, first-degree falsifying business records and fifth-degree conspiracy. The defendant was arraigned on June 6, 2018, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Toni Cimino, who ordered supervised release. The defendant's return date was today and she faces up to seven years in prison if convicted.

Defendants Chukuweike Emeni and Teyana Paul are also charged in the insurance fraud case.

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