



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FOUR INDICTED ON CONSPIRACY, ROBBERY CHARGES **Accused of abducting employees from homes**

COLUMBUS -- A federal grand jury here has returned a second superseding indictment charging four Columbus residents with multiple crimes including conspiracy, firearms charges and robberies of a bank, two credit unions and three check-cashing businesses between March 2002 and July 2004. In each robbery, an employee of the financial institution or business was abducted from their home and forced to accompany the robbers to the scene of the crime.

Named in the indictment are Eric K. Watkins, age 42, and Sheena Bowles, age 37, both of 2664 Perdue Avenue; Gary G. Watkins, age 41, of 2750 Patrick Henry; and Frankie Lee Jones, age 55 of 6628 Seahurst Drive, all of Columbus.

Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio; Christopher P. Sadowski, Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives for Ohio and Indiana; and Columbus Police Chief James G. Jackson announced the indictment in conjunction with James H. Robertson, Acting Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Cincinnati Field Division; Chief Jeanne A. Miller of the Reynoldsburg Police Department; Chief James E. Stacy, Whitehall Police Department; and Chief M.E. Mauger, Worthington Police Department. The indictment was returned yesterday.

Lockhart said the investigation is ongoing and a reward of up to \$50,000 is still available for people who provide information that can help solve the case. People with information should contact Columbus Police Robbery Squad at 614 645-4665.

- MORE -

Watkins page 2

“Determined investigators uncovered evidence that led to the additional charges and the additional people involved,” Lockhart said. “This indictment proves that persistence pays off.”

“We want the victims of these terrible crimes and their families to know that we did not forget them,” Sadowski said. “These charges are the result of hard work, officers and agents putting ‘boots on the ground’ and partnerships. We hope our work brings the victims and their families some comfort.”

The indictment alleges that from December 2001 through January 2003, Gary Watkins planned the commission of the robberies of check-cashing businesses and enlisted at least one person to carry out the robberies. He also allegedly conspired with Eric Watkins, Frankie Lee Jones and others from April 2002 through July 30, 2004 to rob the bank and credit unions.

The indictment alleges that Gary Watkins, Frankie Lee Jones, Eric Watkins, and others would abduct employees of check-cashing businesses and local financial institutions from their residences at gunpoint and force them to drive to their place of employment. The indictment accuses the three men and others of robbing employees of cash at gunpoint, and binding the employees’ hands with a device commonly referred to as plastic zip ties.

The charges are connected to the March 22, 2002 robbery of Quick Cash, 6591 East Main Street; the June 27, 2002 robbery of Checkland, 699 Harrisburg Pike; the December 9, 2002 robbery of Cashland, 4499 Refugee Road; the April 9, 2002 robbery of Sky Bank, 2880 North High Street; the May 23, 2003 robbery of the Whitehall Credit Union, 5025 East Main Street; and the July 23, 2004 robbery of the Western Credit Union, 750 Georgesville Road, all in the Columbus area.

The indictment charges Gary Watkins with one count of conspiracy to commit armed bank robbery (up to five years imprisonment), one count of conspiracy to commit armed robbery (up to 20 years imprisonment); three counts of armed robbery (up to 20 years imprisonment); three counts of armed bank robbery (up to 25 years imprisonment); and six counts of use of a firearm during a crime of violence (seven years mandatory consecutive for the first count; 25 years mandatory consecutive for each remaining count).

- MORE -

Eric Watkins faces one count of conspiracy, one count of armed bank robbery for the Western Credit Union robbery, one firearm count and one count of possession of stolen money.

Frankie Lee Jones is charged with one count of conspiracy, one count of armed bank robbery of the Sky Bank, and one firearm charge.

Sheena Bowles is charged with one count of concealment of stolen money.

A federal grand jury initially indicted Eric Watkins on August 10, 2004. Agents arrested Eric Watkins then and he has been in custody since. A superseding indictment added Bowles on October 30. She was arrested then released on bond.

ATF agents, Columbus and Worthington police officers arrested Gary Watkins and Jones yesterday without incident.

Lockhart commended ATF Agent Craig Brennaman and Columbus Police Detective Greg Franken who have been investigating the case for more than two years, the cooperation between the ATF, FBI, Columbus Police, Worthington Police, Whitehall Police and Reynoldsburg Police, and Assistant U.S. Attorney David Bosley, who is prosecuting the case.

An indictment is merely an accusation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty in court.

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