



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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CON MAN INDICTED IN IMPERSONATION SCAM

-- Charged With Defrauding Numerous Motorists In 3 Boroughs By Posing As A City Official --

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), and CHARLES J. HYNES, Kings County District Attorney, today announced the arrest and indictment of MICHAEL C. WADE in connection with a scheme to defraud motorists by posing as a City official who could collect their overdue parking fines and release their cars, most of which had been towed by City Marshals. Commissioner Gill Hearn and District Attorney Hynes said that, in the last 14 months, as many as 25 motorists in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx had reported the impersonation scam, and that 16 had been swindled out of a total of \$8,500. New York City Police Department (NYPD) Detectives from DOI's Detective Squad arrested WADE on April 19 in Brooklyn. The indictment was unsealed today in State Supreme Court in Brooklyn.

Commissioner Gill Hearn said, " It is always troubling when the unsuspecting public falls prey to con men like Mr. WADE. By impersonating a City official, he exploited New Yorkers' trust in law enforcement and government. I am proud of the excellent work by DOI's investigators and its squad of NYPD detectives in apprehending Mr. WADE and exposing this scheme. I am also grateful for the cooperation received from the victims and the support of the Kings County District Attorney in promptly obtaining this indictment."

"Con artists employing scams like Mr. Wade's are predators whose victims not only lose their money but their faith in law enforcement. I congratulate the excellent work of the Department of Investigation in bringing this case to my office and promise it will be vigorously prosecuted," said Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes.

Commissioner Gill Hearn and District Attorney Hynes said that the charges against WADE resulted from DOI's investigation of a "pattern crime" -- 20 nearly identical scams in which as many as 25 victims were targeted, between February 2001 and April 18, 2002, outside 11 separate City Marshals' and Parking Violations Operations (PVO) offices in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. The victims reported that, as they were approaching or leaving those offices, carrying cash to pay overdue PVO fines and retrieve their towed vehicles, they encountered an individual, later identified as WADE, who said that he was a City official -- either a Marshal, a Marshal's employee, or, in other instances, a PVO supervisor -- with the authority to collect outstanding fines and release towed vehicles.

According to the victims, WADE provided seemingly plausible reasons for intercepting them outside the official offices, such as that the staff was on a break, the office had just closed, or the computer was inoperable.

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Most of the victims said that WADE used a cell phone in their presence, ostensibly to speak with his staff about their vehicles and fines. By impersonating a City official, WADE persuaded as many as 16 motorists to pay him cash, in amounts ranging from \$232 to \$767, purportedly in exchange for releasing their cars.

On Friday, April 19, 2002, DOI detectives, accompanied by one of WADE's victims, were canvassing the Gravesend section in Brooklyn, one of the neighborhoods in which WADE had carried out his scheme, when the victim recognized WADE outside City Marshal Jeffrey Rose's office at 1503 Gravesend Neck Road. After a short chase, WADE was placed under arrest.

Commissioner Gill Hearn said that DOI investigators first learned of WADE's scheme in February 2001, when a couple, on their way to the second-floor office of City Marshal Ruth Burko, located at 38 Westchester Square, in the Bronx, reported that a slim, well-dressed black man, who identified himself as "Marshal M. Burko" had stopped them in the stairwell and told them that, although the computer was "down," he would help them retrieve their car, if they would accompany him to another office in the area. According to the couple, as they passed the yard where their car was impounded, the would-be Marshal waved to a yard employee. The impersonator made a call on his cell phone, purportedly to his "secretary," after which he advised the couple that they owed \$767 (approximately \$200 more than their outstanding judgment and related fees.) The victims paid WADE the \$767, in cash, and waited for their car, which never arrived.

Six months later, on August 20, 2001, another motorist, while leaving PVO's Help Center on Joralemon Street, in Brooklyn, and en route to City Marshal Frank Siracusa's office at 546 Court Street, encountered a man, similar in appearance and description to the individual who previously identified himself as "Marshal M. Burko," who now said that he was a "supervisor." The purported supervisor attempted to coax the car owner into a building at 111 Court Street, some 20 blocks from Marshal Siracusa's office, pointing to a posted notice in the vestibule containing Siracusa's name. However, the car owner became suspicious, and called Marshal Siracusa. Marshal Siracusa's office advised the motorist not to pay anyone at that location.

Two days later, on August 22, 2001, a man whose appearance matched that of both "Marshal M. Burko" and the purported "supervisor," approached a woman outside Marshal Siracusa's office, and said that he was an employee of the Sheriff's Office. The imposter attempted to convince the woman to walk with him "around the corner" to a parking lot, where, he said, her car was impounded. At that moment, one of Marshal Siracusa's employees, a retired police officer, arrived and challenged the man, who ran away without obtaining any money.

During the first part of November 2001, three new victims reported having paid a total of nearly \$1,900 to a man whose appearance and method matched those described by the previous victims. These thefts occurred outside 3 different offices in two boroughs: the PVO Help Center at 1400 Williamsbridge Road, in the Westchester Square area of the Bronx, and two City Marshal's offices -- Marshal Rose's office in Gravesend, Brooklyn, and City Marshal George Airday's office in North Riverdale. DOI alerted all City Marshals and PVO officials to WADE's scam.

Finally, between February 1 and April 18, 2002, DOI received reports of 14 additional thefts and attempted thefts, occurring at various times of day outside 11 different Marshals' and PVO offices in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens, in which car owners said they paid the imposter a total of \$5,849. During this time, teams of DOI detectives visited all of the locations involved, interviewed the victims, the City Marshals, and their employees, used a police artist to produce a sketch of the suspect, alerted NYPD precincts throughout the City, and canvassed the areas where the "con man" had struck. These collaborative efforts led to WADE's arrest and today's indictment.

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WADE, 34, of 10 South Roberts Road, Highland, New York, has been charged with 2 counts of Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, a Class E felony; 1 count of Scheme to Defraud in the Second Degree, 7 counts of Petit Larceny, and 7 counts of Criminal Impersonation in the Second Degree, all Class A misdemeanors. If convicted, he faces up to 4 years in prison.

Commissioner Gill Hearn and District Attorney Hynes expressed their sincere appreciation to NYPD Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, Department of Finance Commissioner Martha E. Stark, and members of their respective staffs, for their cooperation and assistance in the investigation, and also to the various City Marshals and their staffs, for promptly notifying DOI of the reported thefts.

The investigation was conducted by DOI's Detective Squad and its Marshals Bureau, particularly NYPD Sergeants Dennis Crowley and John Verwoert, Detectives Levie Taylor and Frank Felicetti, and Assistant Inspector General Percy Corcoran and Confidential Investigator Teresa Pinckney.

Assistant District Attorneys Jeffrey Ferguson and Mark Hunter, of DA Hynes' Rackets Bureau, under the supervision of Bureau Chief Anne Seely, have been assigned to prosecute the case.

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