



Department of Investigation

Press Release

Release #048-99

**DOI UNDERCOVER "STING" SNARES QUEENS COUPLE
IN \$1 MILLION THEFT OF 8 CITY-OWNED BUILDINGS & BACK TAXES
*COUPLE ARRESTED AS THEY PAY BRIBE IN BROOKLYN PARK***

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1999 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of TOMA DUSHEVIC and his former wife, NICOLETTA DIBARI, both of Woodhaven, Queens, for "stealing" City-owned buildings, valued at over \$500,000. The defendants were further charged with making more than \$5,000 in payoffs to a DOI undercover agent, posing as a City Department of Finance (DOF) assessor, to remove more than \$600,000 in back taxes on several of the properties and to create paperwork to conceal their illegal activity.

The defendants were arrested yesterday when they met the undercover in Brooklyn's Cadman Plaza Park to sign additional deeds and make another bribe payment.

Commissioner Kuriansky noted that the properties, 7 of which are in Brooklyn and one in Queens, are "in rem" properties that the City acquired when their private former owners fell into tax arrears. The properties are owned and administered by the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). In all, he said, the two defendants attempted to defraud the City of New York of \$1.1 million in property and taxes.

According to the felony complaints filed in the case, between October 1998 and July 1999, DUSHEVIC and DIBARI filed fraudulent deeds with DOF's City Register's Office, which purported to transfer ownership of the in rem properties from the City to either themselves or to the Malsia Corporation, a construction company they controlled and operated out of DUSHEVIC's residence.

In April 1999, DUSHEVIC allegedly sent forged letters to DOF directing that the tax arrears be waived on 5 of the properties they had illegally acquired. The letters, containing the forged signature of former Department of General Services (DGS) Commissioner Kenneth Knuckles, were prepared on letterhead of both DGS (an agency that then no longer existed) and HPD (where Mr. Knuckles never served as Commissioner). An alert DOF employee assigned to the Special Programs Unit noted the suspicious signatures and immediately notified DOI.

Thereafter, a DOI undercover agent, posing as a DOF property assessor, met with the defendants and was paid more than \$5,000 in cash by DUSHEVIC and DIBARI for the removal of the taxes on the properties. The defendants also requested that the undercover correct the suspect deeds that they had previously filed, as well as help them acquire another property by filing a false deed on behalf of DIBARI.

At the time of their arrest, DUSHEVIC and DIBARI had already obtained building permits for several of the buildings and were in the process of renovating them.

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The properties, several of which the City was preparing to sell to community groups, are located at 31 Bartlett Street, 868 Bedford Avenue, 88 South 4th Street, 129 Franklin Avenue, 131 Franklin Avenue, 269 Lee Avenue, and 224 Broadway, all in Brooklyn, and at 86-43 90th Street in Queens.

Mr. Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to Department of Finance Commissioner Andrew S. Eristoff, Department of Housing Preservation and Development Commissioner Richard T. Roberts, Department of Citywide Administrative Services Commissioner William J. Diamond and their staffs for their assistance and cooperation during the course of the investigation.

DUSHEVIC, also known as Toma Dusevic, 34, of 86-42 107th Street in Woodhaven, and DIBARI, 42, of 86-30 98th Street, also in Woodhaven, were variously charged with the crimes of Grand Larceny in the Second Degree, Attempted Grand Larceny in the Second and Third Degrees, Bribery in the Third Degree, Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second and Third Degrees, Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, and Attempted Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree. If convicted, DUSHEVIC faces up to 15 years in prison and DIBARI faces up to 7 years in prison.

The investigation was conducted by DOI Assistant Commissioner and DOF Inspector General Vincent E. Green and members of his staff, including Assistant Inspector General Alberta Ancrum, Confidential Investigator Amy Harmon, and Investigative Tax Auditor Phillip Littrean. Also assisting in the investigation were Senior Financial Auditor Kandi Conquest, of the Brooklyn District Attorney's Financial Investigations Unit, the DOF Revenue Operations' Special Programs Unit, and the City Register's Office.

The Office of Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes is prosecuting the case. Senior Assistant District Attorney Richard K. Farrell, of the Rackets Bureau, is handling the matter under the supervision of Deputy District Attorney Melissa Jackson.