



PRESS RELEASE

Riverside Police Department • 4102 Orange Street • Riverside, CA 92501
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Wednesday, March 19, 2008
Contact: Steven Frasher, Press Information Officer
Phone: (951) 826-5147

Sweetheart Scam victimizes elder

Riverside, CA -- On Tuesday, March 18, 2008, Riverside Police investigators, Problem Oriented Policing Team Officers and Dorothy Miller, coordinator of the Department of Social Services (DPSS)/Curtailling Abuse Related to the Elderly (CARE) Program, served a search warrant at a home in the 1400-block of Arrow Creek Drive, in Perris, CA, resulting in the arrest of two persons defrauding an elderly Riverside man.

The search was the result of a coordinated investigation conducted by Riverside Police Detective Brian Money and CARE Coordinator Dorothy Miller, during which they identified the victim of a fraud. The victim, a 79-year-old Riverside man, was recently widowed and described as isolated and lonely with no family. He resides in a HUD-subsidized apartment because he can afford little else on his Social Security income.

Arrested are Perris residents Nina COSTELLO, 34, and Larry THOMPSON, 35; both charged with 532(a) PC theft by false pretenses, and 368(d) PC elder abuse fraud.

He was befriended by suspect Nina Costello, who told the victim that she, too, was destitute and over time she convinced him to become engaged with her and that she would help him do "Christ's work." As Costello further developed the relationship, she told the victim that she needed his help to furnish her home, in which he would eventually live in with her. She also convinced him that she needed him to purchase a car for her business as an interior decorator. Larry Thompson portrayed himself as Costello's brother and also asked for and received cash assistance from the victim for a bogus claim.

Over a period of about six months, she used the victim's credit to purchase approximately \$80,000 worth of property, which included furnishings, a 2007 Chevrolet Tahoe and an engagement ring. The property was seized during the search warrant; the engagement ring was located at a pawnshop, where it had been exchanged for cash.

Fraudulent predators "are tremendously supportive while they're involved with lonely seniors," said Margo Hamilton, regional manager of the CARE program, "but they leave the victims emotionally and financially devastated."

The investigation continues. Anyone with information helpful to this investigation, or who may also have been victimized, is asked to call Riverside Police Detective Brian Money at (951) 363-7118.

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