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CON MEN, CORPORATION PLEAD GUILTY
IN DEED FRAUD SCHEME TO STEAL HOUSES IN QUEENS, NASSAU
Nine Homes Returned to Rightful Owners

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Russell Carbone and Terrell Hill pleaded guilty to a wide-ranging scheme to steal residential properties by filing forged deeds with city officials. As part of the plea, the court voided deeds to seven homes in Queens and two in Nassau County so they could be returned to their rightful owners.

Carbone and Hill worked together to target homes where the owners died and their heirs had not taken title to them. To help find the properties, Hill, a landscaper, would alert Carbone, a disbarred attorney, to homes that appeared abandoned. Most turned out to have gone into foreclosure.

District Attorney Katz said: “When I started the Housing and Worker Protection Bureau three years ago, I promised to protect homeowners from predatory real estate scams that often target vulnerable neighborhoods. Since then, we have undone the criminal handiwork of scammers and con artists and [pioneered the use of a state statute to return stolen properties to their rightful owners](#). With the conclusion of this prosecution, the largest we have undertaken so far, our office will have restored a total of 14 homes to their rightful owners.”

Carbone, 69, of Beach Ninth Street in Far Rockaway, and Hill, 40, of Woodfield Road, West Hempstead, pleaded guilty before Queens Supreme Court Justice Leigh Cheng to scheme to defraud in the first degree and six counts of offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree. RC Couture Realty Inc., a corporation run by Carbone and his wife, Galyna Couture, 61, pleaded guilty to criminal possession of stolen property in the first degree and six counts of offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree.

In addition to forfeiting the ill-gotten deeds, Carbone will pay \$56,960 in restitution. The money represents rent payments he collected after illegally taking over properties and leasing them out. The money will go to the heirs of the legitimate property owners. Carbone’s license as a notary was also revoked.

R.C. Couture Realty must pay a \$100,000 fine.

Hill is also expected to face up to three years in prison when he is sentenced on January 30, 2024.

The Queens homes stolen were located on 116th Road, 115th Avenue, 148th Street and 192nd Street in Jamaica; on 131st Avenue in Laurelton Gardens; and on 104th Avenue and 192nd Street in St. Albans.

In Nassau County, the homes were on Pinebrook Avenue in West Hempstead and Advent Street in Westbury.

In some instances, the deeds were transferred more than once among the defendants and entities connected to them, resulting in 14 deeds for nine homes.

In two additional cases that were part of the charged scheme to defraud, Carbone and Hill had already agreed to relinquish deeds to the legitimate owners.

And in another case, the duo had already sold a home on 148th Street in Jamaica to a third party. The District Attorney's office will file a motion to apply a state statute and restore that deed to its rightful owner, sparing the victim the time and expense of additional legal proceedings in civil court.

According to the charges and plea agreements:

- Between November 8, 2019, and February 14, 2023, Hill and Carbone forged signatures on property records to transfer to themselves the ownership of multiple properties.
- The signatures were notarized with fraudulent notary stamps that Hill ordered from Amazon in the names of actual notaries. Carbone also used his own, legitimate notary stamp on some documents.
- The fraudulent documents were filed with the New York City Department of Finance.

In the case of the home on 116th Road in Jamaica, Hill called a Bronx woman in November 2019 about possibly selling the house, which she had inherited with her brother. Following the phone conversation, Hill introduced the victim to his "business partner," Carbone, who met the woman at a local coffee shop to discuss the sale. The woman declined the purchase offer.

A deed transferring title to the property was filed nonetheless on March 12, 2021, indicating that RC Couture Realty, Inc. and Terrell Hill each owned a 48% interest in the property and the victim and her sibling each owned a 1% share.

Hill and Carbone forged the siblings' signatures on the deed transfer documents, which were stamped with a fraudulent notary stamp and Carbone's legitimate stamp.

The actual notary told investigators that the stamp was not hers. Hill's Amazon records showed he ordered a notary stamp with this notary's information and had it shipped to his home in West Hempstead.

In another case, a 2021 deed transfer for a home on Sutter Avenue in Jamaica included the purported signature of an heir to the property's original owner. The document said the home was transferred to Carbone and Hill with the heir retaining 1% ownership.

The heir said he did not sign the document. The notary whose stamp is on the paperwork also said he did not sign, nor stamp, the document. Hill's Amazon records showed another purchase shipped to his home in West Hempstead for a notary stamp with this notary's information as well.

A nephew of the property's original owner was living in the home and Carbone wrote to him, portraying himself as the new owner trying to "make a deal" to get him to leave. Carbone then started eviction proceedings against him.

Facing a civil lawsuit, Hill and Carbone agreed to void the deed, returning the home to the rightful owner.

Assistant District Attorney Rachel Stein, Chief of the Real Estate Theft Unit, in the District Attorney's Housing and Worker Protection Bureau prosecuted the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys William Jorgenson, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Gerard A. Brave.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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