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FOUR INDIVIDUALS INDICTED IN DEED FRAUD SCHEME

*Accused of Stealing Homes in Kew Gardens Hills, Queens Village and Jamaica Estates
One of the Homes Was Sold to New Owners for \$600,000*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that four individuals and three companies were indicted on charges of grand larceny, criminal possession of stolen property, conspiracy and other crimes for allegedly stealing three homes from their rightful owners in the neighborhoods of Kew Gardens Hills, Queens Village and Jamaica Estates. Carl Avinger, Autumn Valeri, Lawrence T. Ray and Torey Guice surrendered today and were arraigned for their alleged roles in the deed fraud scheme that included falsifying documents and filing false deeds with the City Register's office from March to July 2023.

District Attorney Katz said: "Property ownership is a fundamental right and my office works to protect that right in this borough. As alleged, the defendants acted in concert to target properties for theft, forge documents, file false instruments and ultimately steal homes from the rightful owners. My Housing and Worker Protection Bureau investigates and prosecutes bad actors who often think they can get away with stealing the most valuable asset of Queens residents. Thank you to my prosecutors, detectives and analysts for their work on this case."

Avinger, 42, of 202nd Street in St. Albans, Valeri, 41, of Commack, NY, and Ray, 38, of 127th Avenue in Jamaica, were arraigned today on a 47-count indictment charging them with grand larceny in the first degree, criminal possession of stolen property in the first degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, criminal possession of a forged instrument in the second degree, identity theft in the first degree, falsifying business records in the first degree, offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree, grand larceny in the second degree, criminal possession of stolen property in the second degree and scheme to defraud in the first degree.

Guice, 40, of Roselle, NJ, was arraigned on the same indictment charging him with grand larceny in the second degree, conspiracy in the fourth degree, criminal possession of a forged instrument in the second degree, identity theft in the first degree, falsifying business records in the first degree and offering a false instrument for filing in the first degree.

Supreme Court Justice Leigh Cheng ordered the defendants to return to court on April 29. Defendants Ray and Valeri face a potential maximum sentence of 8 1/3 to 25 years in prison, if convicted of the top count. Defendant Avinger faces up to 12 1/2 to 25 years and defendant Guice faces up to five to 15 years.

DA Katz said that, according to the indictment and investigation, on or about April 10, 2023, Avinger and Valeri – who is a licensed real estate agent – acting in concert with two others, filed a false document with the New York City Department of Finance. It recorded the deed transfer of a home on 208th Street in Jamaica Estates from a 76-year-old woman, who is the rightful owner, to Shuler Management LLC, owned by Ray. One of the purported signatures on the deed was of a former co-owner who died in 2016. The notary signature on the transfer was also found to be fraudulent.

On or about April 28, 2023, Avinger and Valeri, acting in concert with Ray, filed a false document with the New York City Department of Finance recording a deed transfer of a home on 61st Road Kew Gardens Hills from a mother and daughter, who are the rightful owners, to Kubick Ray Kubick LLC, which is owned by Ray. The signatures on the deed were forged to represent the signatures of both the mother and the daughter, who confirmed that they never signed the document. The notary signature on the transfer was also found to be fraudulent.

In May 2023, the 61st Road home was sold to a third party for \$600,000 and a fraudulent marriage certificate with the name of one of the victims and driver's license for the other victim, along with forged corporate documents, was provided by the defendants to the title company. Approximately \$442,000 in sale proceeds was wired to a TD Bank account owned by Ray's LLC.

The third party who purchased the property has since filed a civil suit against the victims claiming legal rights to the home. The District Attorney's office successfully utilized RPAPL 756-A, signed into law in November 2023, to stay the civil proceeding to quiet title of a property that is the subject of a pending deed fraud investigation.

On or about May 4, 2023, the defendants, acting in concert with two others, filed a false document with the New York City Department of Finance recording a deed transfer of a home on Kendrick Place in Jamaica Estates from an 82-year-old woman, who is the rightful owner, to Castaneda Ray Family LLC, owned by Ray. The signature on the deed was forged to represent the signature of the owner, who confirmed that she never signed the document. The notary signature on the transfer was also found to be fraudulent.

The four defendants surrendered to the Queens District Attorney's detectives earlier today.

The investigation was conducted by Assistant District Attorney Rachel Stein, Deputy Chief of the District Attorney's Housing and Worker Protection Bureau, with assistance from Detective Thomas Kaup of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau, under the supervision of Sergeant Richard Lewis, under the overall supervision of Chief Investigator Robert LaPollo.

Trial Prep Assistant Jason Kappel and investigative accountant Barak Haimoff provided crucial assistance.

Assistant District Attorney Stein is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Christina Hanophy, Senior Deputy Bureau Chief, William Jorgenson, 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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