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FORMER ADMINISTRATOR AT QUEENS CHARITY CHARGED WITH STEALING \$872,000
MEANT TO FEED THE NEEDY FROM THE ORGANIZATION

*Defendant Allegedly Used Funds to Buy 22 Acres of Upstate Land and for Architectural and Design Services;
Faces up to 15 Years in Prison, if Convicted*

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Otto Starzmann was charged with grand larceny and criminal possession of stolen property for stealing \$872,440 from River Fund, the Queens nonprofit where he worked as an administrator. The money was supposed to provide fresh produce to needy families. Starzmann allegedly spent \$429,508 of the money to buy 22 acres of land in upstate Warwick, NY, and more of the charity's funds to pay for architectural services and to pad his own bank account.

District Attorney Katz said: "Instead of paying farmers to fill his employer's warehouse with healthy food for the needy and vulnerable in our community, the defendant is accused of stealing the charitable funds. He is alleged to have violated the professional trust of his colleagues and used more than \$429,000 to buy property for himself. I thank the NYPD and my Frauds Bureau for their work on this investigation."

Starzmann, 60, of Anderson Road in St. Albans, was arraigned last night before Queens Criminal Court Judge Diego Freire on charges of grand larceny in the second degree and criminal possession of stolen property in the second degree.

If convicted, Starzmann faces a potential maximum of five to 15 years in prison. Judge Freire ordered the defendant to return to court on September 4.

District Attorney Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, Starzmann was employed as the chief production officer of River Fund, a charitable organization based in Richmond Hill, and his responsibilities included securing grants and placing large food orders. The organization operates a food pantry and makes food deliveries to the needy. Unbeknownst to River Fund, the defendant had formed a company called Foodgate Inc.

Between May 10, 2022, and October 26, 2022, Starzmann submitted five invoices from Foodgate to River Fund totaling \$872,440 to secure advance payments for future deliveries of prepaid fresh produce. River Fund then paid Foodgate to grow an assortment of produce, including green beans, corn and squash, and deliver the vegetables to the organization's warehouse.

According to investigators, there were no food deliveries or parcels in the organization's warehouse matching the invoices. None of the prepaid farm produce was ever delivered.

It was later discovered that the \$872,440 paid to Foodgate went to an Evolve Bank and Trust account, where the defendant was the sole account owner. The company also had no employees.

Once the deposits were in the Foodgate account, the defendant allegedly transferred approximately \$753,705 into a second Evolve bank account also tied to him. At least 20 withdrawals were made from the account including two transactions totaling \$429,508.20 to a law firm for a closing payment balance and additional down payment on three real estate parcels in Warwick totaling approximately 22 acres of vacant land; six payments totaling \$60,388.97 to an architecture and design firm; and 12 cash withdrawals totaling \$70,480.94. An additional \$77,000 in cash was also sent to Starzmann's personal bank accounts.

The investigation was conducted with the assistance of NYPD Detective Anthony Guerriero of the Queens District Attorney's NYPD Squad, with the assistance of Detective Robert Patterson, under the supervision of Sergeant Thomas Rouse, and under the overall supervision of Lieutenant Christopher Kehoe, and with the assistance of Silvana Sutich, investigative accountant with the Queens District Attorney's Forensic Accounting Unit.

Assistant District Attorney Dimitris Gizas of the District Attorney's Frauds Bureau is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorney Hana C. Kim, Acting 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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