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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Re: Theft Ring

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MODESTO, CALIFORNIA –

A joint investigation by the Stanislaus County District Attorney's Office and the Stanislaus County Auto Theft Task Force (StanCATT), has virtually shut down a small, but very prolific identity theft ring that has been operating throughout the Central Valley, Bay Area, and Northern California.

Evidence in the case indicates a fairly sophisticated level of fraudulent activity, occurring over a wide area, and often involving use of the internet. Members of StanCATT served a search warrant at 1300 Giahos in Modesto. Evidence seized included many completed Credit Card Authorization Forms that appeared to have been presented to various hotels. Most included photo copies of fraudulent and stolen identification, credit cards and credit accounts. They purported to authorize use of the listed credit accounts to charge rooms, room service, phone, meals, movies, and the like. At least one fraudulent credit card authorization form authorized charges for the "Family of Laci Peterson," from February 27, 2003 through March 6, 2003.

A similar method of operation appears to have been used to steal cars, rent trucks, and perpetrate a variety of other frauds. The group even victimized a local charity with the fraudulent purchase of two cars. Both of those cars have since been recovered, one during service of a search warrant at the location that appeared to have been the focal point of the group's activity. One common thread in many of the frauds appears to be the use of the fraudulent third party credit card authorization forms and a local cell phone number for contact verification. In addition, officers seized computers, stacks of fraudulent and stolen ID cards, credit cards, and DMV documents. The computers were used to

obtain further identifying information about credit card account holders to order merchandise using the stolen identities and account information. Among the merchandise obtained via the internet were large quantities of vehicle parts - in particular alternators.

Other items of evidence seized included computer printouts of guest names, complete with their credit card account numbers, including some that were obviously from hotels. It is yet to be determined whether those were provided by contacts working inside the hotels, or whether the documents were not properly disposed of and were recovered through the trash.

Those arrested included Kimberly Sue Brown, 33 years, and Samuel Torres, 40 years, each charged with a variety of crimes - including conspiracy, possession and receipt of stolen property, using personal identifying information of another to obtain goods, unauthorized access and use of credit card information. Brandon Miller, 32 years, was arrested on a "no bail" warrant. All have bailed out. It is anticipated that other members of the group will be arrested in the near future.

Investigators are seeking help from the public in tracking down additional suspects, victims and witnesses in the case. Those who feel they might have been victimized by this group, or have information, can contact Investigator Marc Burrell or Investigator Ken Reid at the District Attorney's Office at (209) 558-4495.

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