



Department of Investigation

Press Release

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DEPUTY SHERIFF AND TOW FIRM ACCOMPLICE ARRESTED IN "SHAKEDOWN" SCAM

-Charged With Pocketing \$11K Cash In Scofflaw Fines From 23 Motorist-

EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrests of BRADLEY NORRIS, a New York City deputy sheriff, and GEORGE DAVILA, an employee of Don Glo Towing, a City Sheriff's towing contractor located at 409 West 218th Street in Manhattan, for defrauding the owners and drivers of 23 scofflaw vehicles in Manhattan and the Bronx by unlawfully demanding and keeping cash payments, totaling more than \$11,000, for unpaid City Parking Violations Operations (PVO) fines, and then issuing fake City Department of Transportation (DOT) and City Department of Finance (DOF) receipts to the victims.

Commissioner Kuriansky said, "Demanding 'pay cash now or be towed,' the deputy sheriff and his pretend-sheriff partner held up motorists like common highwaymen -- often several times a night. Norris sullied his shield by using it as a sword to steal from both an unsuspecting public and the City treasury. This is the first arrest of a deputy sheriff in recent memory, and should be a sharp warning to any law enforcement official who would abuse his powers to prey on the very citizens he is sworn to serve."

City Sheriff Cal Mathis said, "I am committed to providing DOI with any assistance they need in their investigation and will continue to do so to achieve and protect the highest standards of public service in this office."

According to Commissioner Kuriansky, approximately 150 uniformed deputy sheriffs -- who are armed peace officers -- work in the City Sheriff's Office, a division of DOF. Deputy Sheriffs are responsible for, among other things, collecting approximately \$14 million in overdue parking fines and penalties each year by towing or restraining approximately 40,000 scofflaw vehicles. Mr. Kuriansky noted that City Marshals seize an additional 78,000 vehicles a year, generating more than \$28 million in City revenue. Vehicles whose owners owe judgments for parking fines totaling more \$230 are subject to being towed.

The City Sheriff currently contracts with 3 firms to tow scofflaw vehicles, including Don Glo Towing. The contract tow firms employ drivers, known as "punchers," who, using mini-computers containing data from the City's Summons Tracking Accounts Receivable System (STARS) and a tow-eligible list compiled weekly by DOF, comb City streets searching for tow-eligible vehicles. Tow company employees may assist deputy sheriffs in identifying and, when specifically directed, removing tow-eligible vehicles, but tow contractors are not authorized themselves to restrain or seize the vehicle, or collect money in the street from its owner to satisfy unpaid fines.

"Throughout this scheme, however," Commissioner Kuriansky noted, "the defendants were clearly only combing the streets looking for 'pigeons,' as they did not even have a tow truck available to seize the vehicles."

Mr. Kuriansky explained that towed vehicles are subject to the following fees, in addition to the amount of the judgment: \$150 towing charge; \$55 sheriff's execution fee; a 5% premium added to the foregoing charges for the sheriff's "poundage" fee; and, a \$10-a-day storage fee, paid directly to the tow contractor. If a vehicle's owner or driver is present when a vehicle has been identified as tow-eligible, a deputy sheriff is authorized to accept a cash payment, called a "Payment in the Field" (PIF), to satisfy the outstanding fines and fees on the spot, thus saving the owner storage costs and half the towing expense. A deputy sheriff who accepts a "PIF" must provide the owner with a completed release form on official DOF letterhead.

Commissioner Kuriansky said the investigation began this past July, when the City Sheriff's Office notified DOI that a Bronx livery car driver alleged that his vehicle, a 1998 Lincoln, had been towed by the Sheriff's Office on July 24, 2001, one day after the driver, on the street near his vehicle, had made a payment of \$473 cash -- which he believed was in satisfaction of \$320 in unpaid PVO fines and related fees -- to two males, at least one of whom was armed, who pulled him over and identified themselves as either City marshals or deputy sheriffs. The livery driver said that, in exchange for the cash payment, the pair, later identified as NORRIS and DAVILA, had presented him with a document purporting to be a valid official vehicle release. However, the vehicle release was actually an altered copy of a release form used by DOT parking garages to document vehicle releases for customers who have lost their time-stamped garage tickets.

DOI investigators reviewed STARS records and found that the livery vehicle's license plate number had been checked by DAVILA on July 23, 2001, at about the same time that the driver reported that he had paid the two males. The DOI investigators later identified additional victims whose license plates had been checked in STARS by DAVILA, including a car service driver, who said that he had paid two individuals \$834 on September 10, 2001, and had received a fake DOT receipt identical to the receipts the pair provided to other victims. This victim happened to copy down the license plate number of the Ford sedan in which the pair had been driving, and investigators traced that plate number to a vehicle which DAVILA had rented on September 9, 2001, from a car rental outlet on the Upper West Side in Manhattan.

On October 25, 2001, DOI was informed by a City marshal that the owners of a 1994 Lexus the marshal had towed that same day reported that, on October 17, 2001, two males, at least one of whom was in uniform, in a red and white Sheriff's vehicle, pulled them over, demanded payment of \$280 for outstanding parking fines, and provided them with a fake receipt similar to the fake DOT receipts given to previous victims, and which had been further altered to resemble an official DOF document. In a separate incident, the owner of a 1997 BMW, whose car was towed by another City marshal, reported that he, too, had been stopped on October 17 and had paid \$727 to two males, also driving a red and white Sheriff's vehicle, and had been given an identical fake receipt. Investigators, using various records, including STARS reports, and other sources of information, later identified the two individuals in the Sheriff's vehicle as NORRIS and DAVILA.

Ultimately, the investigation disclosed that, between July 23, 2001 and November 15, 2001, 23 different vehicle owners and drivers had given NORRIS and DAVILA, at various locations in Manhattan and the Bronx, cash payments ranging from \$200 to \$834, and totaling \$11,143, purportedly to satisfy outstanding judgments and fees, in the mistaken belief that both NORRIS and DAVILA were acting in an official City capacity and that the victims' payments were being applied to their outstanding PVO fines. Each of the 23 victims was issued a fake DOT payment receipt or release. Some of the victims reported that the men had used a red dashboard emergency light in their vehicle, displayed shields, wore dark shirts or jackets with official-looking insignia and bullet-proof vests, and carried holstered firearms.

NORRIS, 37, of 84-37 118th Street Kew Gardens, New York, a deputy sheriff for 10 years, was earning a base salary of \$49,000 a year, plus overtime. He has been suspended without pay pending a disciplinary hearing. He is charged with the following crimes: Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, a Class E felony; Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, a Class D felony; Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, a Class E felony; and, Petit Larceny, a Class A misdemeanor. If convicted, he faces up to 7 years in prison.

DAVILA, 31, of 320 East 176th Street in the Bronx, is charged with Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, a Class E felony; Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, a Class D felony; Petit Larceny; and, Criminal Impersonation in the Second Degree, both Class A misdemeanors. If convicted, he also faces up to 7 years in prison. DAVILA has worked in the towing industry for at least 10 years, most recently, since 1999, as a "puncher" for Don Glo Towing -- which, Mr. Kuriansky noted, was not in any way involved in this scheme and cooperated in the investigation.

Commissioner Kuriansky expressed his sincere appreciation to DOF Commissioner Andrew S. Eristoff, City Sheriff Cal Mathis, and several City marshals for their cooperation in the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by DOI's Marshals Bureau, particularly Chief Auditor Percy Corcoran and Special Investigator Ron Green, and NYPD Detective Eddie Lebron of the DOI Investigative Squad.

The Office of Bronx District Attorney Robert T. Johnson is prosecuting the case. Assistant District Attorneys Jeffrey Glucksman and George DeMeo are in charge of the prosecution, under the supervision of Richard Baker, Chief of the Arson and Economic Crimes Bureau, and Deputy Bureau Chief William Zelenka.