



Department of Justice

United States Attorney, Stephen J. Murphy
Eastern District of Michigan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**MICHIGAN TEAM MEETS WITH ATTORNEY GENERAL
ALBERTO R. GONZALES, ENHANCES STRATEGIES TO COMBAT
GANG VIOLENCE AND GUN CRIMES**

18 local representatives from the Eastern District of Michigan attend conference

Detroit, Michigan – Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales this week brought together over 1,300 federal, state and local prosecutors, law enforcement officials, community leaders and other members of the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) teams from across the nation to discuss efforts to reduce and prosecute gun crime. Eighteen local representatives from Michigan participated in the fourth PSN national conference in Denver, including members of the Detroit Police Department, Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, Northwest District Weed and Seed, Michigan Department of Corrections as well as the U.S. Attorney's Office, sharing successful strategies for combating gun crime and gang violence. The Bush Administration has devoted more than \$1.6 billion to PSN since 2001, including nearly \$40 million that will be distributed to local task forces this year.

"Project Safe Neighborhoods is a street-level partnership that helps local leaders solve local problems," said Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. "Through this program, law enforcement at every level supports innovative strategies to combat gun crime and gang violence in communities across America."

The conference centers on PSN's many successes in fighting gun crime since the initiative was announced by President Bush in 2001, and on using PSN's partnerships and successful strategies to combat the problem of gang violence.

"Our partners at the state and local level will be crucial to our anti-gang strategy for the Eastern District of Michigan. We will pursue a coordinated, carefully planned strategy that will root out gang activity, particularly armed organizations involved in drug trafficking. First we will identify them, then target our local, state and federal resources to dismantle them and put their members in prison," said United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy. "This program also includes a strong prevention component, in that it includes crucial community building resources as well, such as funds to help ex-offenders to stay out of trouble, develop skills, and find jobs."

Since combating gang-violence can only be done by working in partnership with state and local law enforcement and community organizations, the Attorney General

directed each U.S. Attorney to convene a Gang Prevention Summit in his or her district designed to explore additional opportunities in the area of gang prevention. These summits are to be held in the next eight months and will bring together law enforcement and community leaders to discuss best practices, identify gaps in services, and create a prevention plan to target at-risk youth within their individual communities.

The Attorney General announced that the Department of Justice released nearly \$30 million in grant assistance to support state and local anti-gang efforts of PSN task forces across the country. In the Eastern District of Michigan, \$600,000 has been allocated to the Detroit Police Department, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office, the Michigan State Police, Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, the Michigan Department of Corrections, and several community service organizations to support enforcement and prevention efforts to combat violent gangs under PSN. In addition, the Department will award \$10 million across the country to support PSN efforts to fight gun crime that is not necessarily gang-related.

These efforts will complement additional Department programs, such as the Attorney General's Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative, which has allocated a total of \$15 million to fund comprehensive prevention, enforcement and re-entry efforts in six sites: Los Angeles, Tampa, Cleveland, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Milwaukee, and the "222 Corridor," between Easton and Lancaster in Pennsylvania.

PSN conference training topics range from enforcement strategies to remove violent gang members and gun criminals from the streets, to school violence prevention programs, and building community partnerships. The strength of PSN continues to be its strategic mix of federal, state and local agencies and community leaders focused on law enforcement and crime prevention. Prosecutors pursue the strongest possible punishment for those who violate firearms statutes, while community partners aggressively educate their constituents about consequence of illegal gun violence and gang activity through services and resources provided by PSN.

For more information, please visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.



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April 3, 2006

EVENT: Sentencing

Defendant: James Earl Sherwood

MIO RESIDENT PLEADS GUILTY TO ARSON

James Earl Sherwood, age 34 of Mio, Michigan, pleaded guilty in Bay City, Michigan on May 2, 2006 to three counts of arson in the Huron-Manistee National Forest.

The indictment charged that on various dates in 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004, Mr. Sherwood set fires in the Huron-Manistee National Forest, creating both a risk of death or serious injury to others, and causing damages and loss in violation of Title 18, United States Code, section 1855. As part of his plea, Sherwood admitted to making delayed ignition devices and using the devices to start fires in the forest.

Mr. Sherwood was originally arrested on a federal warrant on June 2, 2004. He is on a \$75,000 unsecured bond. The penalty for each count of conviction is up to 5 years in prison, plus fines and restitution. Sentencing for Sherwood is set for August 3, 2006 at 3:00 pm.

United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy said, "Protecting our National Forests, particularly from the danger of arson, is important not only because of the need to preserve our resources, but to protect human lives. I applaud the excellent local, state and federal cooperation which lead to this successful prosecution."

The case was investigated by a task force consisting of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Oscoda and Alcona County Sheriff's Departments, the Michigan State

Police and the U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement Division. Anyone with information regarding forest fires may contact the U.S. Forest Service at (989) 826-3252.



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May 8, 2006

EVENT: Complaint

Defendant: Fairway Trails Limited, L.P et al

YPSILANTI APARTMENT COMPLEX BEING SUED IN FEDERAL COURT

The United States Attorney's Office announced that it has filed a lawsuit today against **FAIRWAY TRAILS LIMITED, L.P., BENCHMARK MANAGEMENT CORP., BENCHMARK MICHIGAN PROPERTIES, INC.,** and **NICOLE MORBACH**. The lawsuit alleges unlawful retaliation under the Fair Housing Act at this Ypsilanti, Michigan apartment complex. Fairway Trails is located at 130 Hewitt Street, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197 .

"Housing discrimination of this sort is fundamentally wrong. No one should be denied housing because they assert their rights under civil rights laws," said Stephen J. Murphy, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan.

The complaint, filed in federal district court in Detroit, Michigan, and assigned to United States District Judge John Corbett O'Meara, alleges that the defendants moved to evict Harry Tyus, a resident at Fairway Trails Apartments, after he complained to the Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan that the defendants would not grant his request for a reasonable accommodation. Mr. Tyus is disabled, due a number of serious health conditions.

Following a bench trial on the eviction proceeding, Washtenaw County Circuit Judge John B. Collins, entered an order requiring defendants to grant Mr. Tyus's request for an accommodation. Two days later, defendants notified Mr. Tyus that they would not renew his lease. This conduct constitutes unlawful retaliation under the Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. § 3617, and Mr. Tyus filed a complaint with department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on April 18, 2005. The Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan assisted Mr. Tyus with his complaint.

HUD investigated Mr. Tyus's complaint, and on March 21, 2006, HUD issued a determination of reasonable cause. On April 7, 2006, Mr. Tyus elected to have the case resolved in federal court. The Department of Justice then filed this suit on behalf of Harry Tyus.

The lawsuit seeks an order prohibiting the defendants from engaging in unlawful housing discrimination and monetary damages for Mr. Tyus, who was forced to move from his apartment at Fairway Trails.

Fighting illegal housing discrimination is a top priority of the United States Attorney and the Department of Justice. In February, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales announced Operation Home Sweet Home, a concentrated initiative to expose and eliminate housing discrimination in America. This initiative was inspired by the plight of displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina who were suddenly forced to find new places to live. Operation Home Sweet Home, however, is not limited to the areas hit by Hurricane Katrina, but targets housing discrimination all over the country-including Michigan.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin and disability. For more information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces, go to www.usdoj.gov/crt.



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May 11, 2006

EVENT: Sentencing

Defendant: Christopher Wells Method

**DEARBORN MAN SENTENCED
TO 120 MONTHS FOR CHILD PORNOGRAPHY CRIMES**

A 30-year-old Dearborn man who had established a child porn library of nearly 300 child pornographic movies and pictures for distribution was sentenced to 120 months in federal prison today for shipping the images to others over the Internet, including to an undercover FBI agent, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today.

Joining in the announcement was FBI Special Agent in Charge Daniel Roberts.

Christopher Wells Method pleaded guilty in December of 2005 to one count of distribution of child pornography via the Internet and one count of possession of child pornography. The digital images and videos contained graphic depictions of violent sexual assaults on children.

In addition to the prison sentence, United States District Court Judge Gerald E. Rosen ordered extensive psychological counseling and sex offender therapy. During sentencing, Judge Rosen noted that the challenge to these types of offenses is not knowing whether

rehabilitation will be successful or if the offender will continue to represent a danger to the community.

United States Attorney Murphy applauded the efforts of the FBI for their aggressive pursuit of those who prey on children. “Protecting these innocent victims of violent sexual assault from suffering the injury of re-victimization by child pornography distributors is paramount. These images represent a photographic record of a violent crime in progress. The horror of the crime, having been reduced to a recording, may well haunt the victims for years to come.”

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John O'Brien.



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May 18, 2006

EVENT: Indictment

Defendant: Talal Khalil Chahine (La Shish Restaurant)

**OWNER AND FINANCIAL MANAGER OF "LA SHISH" RESTAURANT
ARE CHARGED WITH TAX EVASION**

Federal charges were unsealed today in Detroit against Talal Khalil Chahine, 51, of Dearborn Heights, Michigan and the owner of the "La Shish" restaurant chain, and Elfat El Aouar, 39 of Plymouth, a "La Shish" financial manager and Chahine's wife. Chahine and El Aouar are charged by the federal grand jury Indictment with four Counts each of Income Tax Evasion, in violation of Title 26, United States Code, Section 7201. Each Count carries a maximum penalty of 5 years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. Elfat El Aouar was arrested earlier today from her home in Plymouth. A bail hearing and arraignment is scheduled to occur at 1:00 p.m. in federal court. Talal Chahine is presently outside the United States and is believed to be in Lebanon. A warrant has been issued for his arrest.

In announcing the Indictment, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy commended the work of the Special Agents of the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The prosecution is being handled by Assistant United

States Attorneys Kenneth R. Chadwell and Julie A. Beck.

As set forth in the Indictment, Talal Khalil Chahine is the sole owner of La Shish, Inc., a Middle Eastern restaurant chain located in the Detroit, Michigan metropolitan area. Elfat El Aouar, who is married to Talal Chahine, has an M.B.A. and has worked at La Shish, Inc. in various capacities including as the company's Vice President of Finance. The Indictment alleges that Talal Chahine and Elfat El Aouar collaborated in a scheme to skim cash proceeds from the restaurants for the tax years 2000 through 2003. During those tax years, it is alleged, La Shish, Inc. maintained a double set of computerized books, records and balance reports, one actual and one altered. The altered records artificially reduced the amount of cash that was actually received by the restaurants. Talal Chahine and Elfat El Aouar oversaw the maintenance of the double set of books, as well as the skimming and concealment of more than \$16,000,000 in cash received by the restaurants. To evade government scrutiny, the skimmed cash was not deposited into U.S. bank accounts, but instead, at the direction of Chahine and El Aouar, converted into cashier's checks and reduced in physical size by changing small denominations into larger ones. These conversions were made for the purpose of transporting the cash outside the United States to Lebanon, away from U.S. government reach and detection. Cash was also skimmed by paying La Shish, Inc. employees all or partly in cash.

United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy said, "The charges today highlight the importance of enforcing our tax laws fairly and diligently. The transferring of millions of dollars in cash from the United States to the Middle East in the attempt to evade taxes will not be tolerated. I commend the hard work of the IRS Criminal Division and the FBI that lead to these charges being unsealed today."

Special Agent Aouate said, "The Internal Revenue Service spends a great deal of its resources in identifying individuals who earn their income legitimately yet willfully fail to report and pay their fair share in taxes. We will continue to work with the United States Attorney to make sure that there are consequences to one's willful actions."

An Indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial in which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.



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May 22, 2006

EVENT: Conviction

Defendant: James Roy Sylvester

SAGINAW DRUG TRAFFICKER SENTENCED TO 35 YEARS

A Saginaw man convicted of multiple drug trafficking and firearms charges was sentenced to a total of 35 years in federal prison on May 22, 2006 by United States District Court Judge David M. Lawson in Bay City, Michigan.

James Roy Sylvester, 49, was convicted by a jury of multiple drug and gun-related charges on September 21, 2005. The convictions arose out of Sylvester's California-to-Michigan drug trafficking operations, which occurred while Sylvester was on parole after being released from state prison in 1998. Sylvester was arrested after receiving a five-kilo cocaine delivery on February 25, 2003 at the bus station in Saginaw, Michigan. Officers responding to the location where the drugs were to be delivered, a house on Jerome Street in Saginaw, were ambushed by individuals who were waiting at the house. In the ensuing gun battle, two law enforcement officers were injured and two of the attackers were killed. Sylvester was already in custody at the time of the attack.

United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy said, "Armed drug trafficking is a path with no way out other than violence or prison. This case could not have succeeded without the hard

work of many local, state and federal agencies, all of which deserve our community's thanks and support. I wish to commend in particular the courage of the two officers who were wounded in the line of duty during this investigation."

The investigation which led to the convictions for Sylvester and his co-defendants was conducted by a variety of law enforcement agencies, including the Saginaw, Michigan, Omaha, Nebraska and Los Angeles, California offices of the DEA; the Saginaw County Sheriff's Department; BAYONET (Bay Area Narcotics Enforcement Team); and the Michigan State Police. The Saginaw County Prosecutor's Office successfully prosecuted the surviving participants in the February 25, 2003 ambush and also forfeited tens of thousands of dollars in drug proceeds that had been seized from Sylvester, his mother, and various associated financial accounts.

Three of Sylvester's co-defendants in the federal case all previously pled guilty and received sentences ranging from probation to 135 months in prison. Two of those co-defendants were from California. The third, Sylvester's mother, was from Saginaw.

Sylvester's 35-year sentence was the result of multiple concurrent sentences of up to 360 months in custody, plus a mandatory consecutive sentence of 60 months which he received for possessing a firearm in connection with his drug trafficking operation. In addition to his conviction for conspiracy, Sylvester was also found guilty of trafficking in cocaine, crack cocaine, oxycondone (OxyContin), diazepam (Valium), hydrocodone (Vicodin), and possession of marijuana, being a felon in possession of a firearm, a user of an illegal controlled substances in possession of a firearm, and multiple counts of interstate travel in aid of his drug trafficking operation. Sylvester's criminal history included a prior conviction for murder. In imposing the sentence, the Court also considered Sylvester's leadership role in the conspiracy and his efforts to influence the testimony of his drug couriers at the trial.



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May 23, 2006

EVENT: Sentencing

Defendant: LaToya Cotton

FORMER STATE HOUSING AGENT SENTENCED

LaToya Cotton, 45, of Canton and former agent of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority ("MSHDA") was sentenced today by United States District Judge Patrick J. Duggan to 41 months after pleading guilty to one count of obtaining over \$1,000,000 by defrauding MSHDA, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today.

Murphy was joined in the announcement by Daniel D. Roberts, Special Agent In Charge of the Detroit Field Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Brandy Westcot, Coordinator for the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

The fraud from MSHDA, a federally funded entity, occurred between 1994 and 2005. During that time, Cotton worked as an agent for MSHDA. Her duties included arranging for State rental vouchers to be paid to low income tenants. Cotton committed the fraud by creating a straw company called "Washtenaw Payee Services" and directing voucher payments to a bank account in the company's name, while claiming the payments were rent payments on behalf of indigent tenants.

As part of her sentence Cotton must forfeit her home and repay the amount obtained by fraud, namely, \$1,052,701.

United States Attorney Murphy said: “A theft from the public treasury is doubly damaging – and loathsome – when it involves funds that were intended for the poor. Any official who steals such funds can expect to be subject to the full force of available federal criminal statutes.”

The investigation of this case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, and the U.S. Bureau of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney R. Michael Bullotta.



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Peggy K. Goodwin, APR Project Safe Neighborhoods Initiative 313.715.0199 or
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May 22, 2006

EVENT: Sentencing

Defendant: Edward Robinson, Jr.

Detroit Drug Dealer Faces 15 Years in Federal Prison

Public Housing Development safer because of Project Safe Neighborhoods

Detroit resident Edward Robinson, Jr., age 49, was sentenced by United States District Court Judge Gerald E. Rosen, to 15 years in federal prison with no chance of parole, followed by eight years of supervised release, for possessing with the intent to distribute crack cocaine and heroin, and for possessing a firearm as a convicted felon, and using it for the purposes of drug trafficking, U.S. Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced today. All of Robinson's criminal activity took place from his apartment in *Brewster Projects*, a government-subsidized, public housing development at 2701 Chrysler Service Drive near downtown Detroit. The U.S. Attorney's Office, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives and Detroit Police Department worked collaboratively on this case as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) initiative. The Drug Enforcement Administration also assisted in the case.

Robinson was convicted by a federal jury on January 24, 2006. Two years earlier, on April 22, 2004, ATF agents, working with a Detroit Police Department Narcotics Team,

conducted a four-month investigation and executed a search warrant of the apartment. At that time, a related ATF investigation of an alleged cocaine supplier lead the agents to Robinson. When the agents and officers entered Robinson's apartment, they observed Robinson seated at a table with 132 Ziploc bags of crack cocaine and heroin. When the officers ordered Robinson to show his hands, he pulled a 9mm handgun from his waistband and began pointing it at the officers. The officer nearest Robinson fired his shotgun and struck Robinson in the abdomen. A second firearm was also confiscated from Robinson's apartment. Robinson recovered and went to trial in January 2006.

"Drug traffickers have chosen a life that leads to violence, incarceration and often death. Drugs and guns unfortunately go hand in hand, and I applaud the efforts of the ATF agents who lead this investigation, and our Detroit Police Officers who helped bring Robinson to justice. We want to give the residents of Brewster Projects a better quality of life away from the threat of drugs and guns," said U.S. Attorney Murphy. "Our agents are committed to working in tandem with Detroit Police Officers and other agencies to protect those we are charged to serve. The enforcement component of the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative is targeting the most violent offenders with firearms, and the PSN team is committed to getting these criminals out of our neighborhoods and away from our children," said Valerie Goddard, Special-Agent-in-Charge, ATF.

Project Safe Neighborhoods also includes public awareness and community engagement. To date, the prevention component of Project Safe Neighborhoods has positively impacted 10,000 youth in middle and high schools in and around metro Detroit through an in-school outreach program called "Project Sentry." Project Safe Neighborhoods Public Awareness Campaign, "Help Us Help You," recently won the 2006 National Award from the U.S. Department of Justice at the Project Safe Neighborhoods Conference in Denver on May 3, 2006. "This is a crucial component of PSN because we know that enforcement is only one part of the equation. Public awareness and community engagement are key to crime prevention," said U.S. Attorney Murphy. New public service announcements (PSAs) featuring Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings, ATF SAC Valerie Goddard and U.S. Attorney Stephen Murphy are airing on UPN, CBS and Comcast; and FOX 2 is airing new Project Safe Neighborhoods public service announcements featuring Ron Savage and Charles Pugh. All Project Safe Neighborhoods PSAs promote the toll-free tip line managed by the ATF, 800.ATF.GUNS. Individuals with knowledge of felons with guns, illegal gun use, sales or trafficking are encouraged to call this tip line, 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and remain anonymous, if they so choose.



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May 25, 2006

EVENT: Guilty Plea

Defendant: Marion Tarasan

**WARREN BUSINESS OWNER PLEADS GUILTY TO
NOT TURNING OVER EMPLOYEE'S WITHHOLDING TAX**

Marion Tarasan, 51, owner and sole shareholder of Alcove Network Corporation, pleaded guilty on May 23, 2006 to a superseding information charging her with tax evasion, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced.

Murphy was joined in the announcement by Maurice Aouate, Special Agent In Charge of the Detroit Field Office of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation.

According to court records, Tarasan purchased Alcove in 1997 and was required by law to withhold employment taxes for her employees and pay them over to the Internal Revenue Service. Between 1999 and 2001, Tarasan failed to pay over \$313,000 in employment taxes. During the same time period, Tarasan took funds from Alcove and paid personal expenses with transactions that were recorded as loans to shareholders, totaling over \$850,000. According to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Alcove Network Corporation is located in Warren, Michigan.

"Our system depends on the voluntary compliance of citizens with our shared responsibility to pay taxes. Employers must be particularly responsible in meeting this lawful

obligation,” said U.S. Attorney Murphy.

“The tax law is very clear – it is the responsibility of each employer to withhold employment taxes from the salaries of their employees and deposit these taxes in full to the Internal Revenue Service. Failure to do so can result in serious consequences,” said Aouate.

Sentencing is scheduled for August 14, 2006 at 2 p.m.

United States Attorney Murphy thanked the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation for their investigation of the case. The United States was represented by Assistant United States Attorney F. William Soisson.



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