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Thursday, June 12, 2008

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TWO SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR VA FRAUD

Tampa, Florida - U.S. District Judge Elizabeth A. Kovachevich today sentenced Frank M. Persicano to 41 months' imprisonment and ordered him to pay restitution to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the amount of \$72,225. Persicano pled guilty on January 31, 2008, to theft of government funds, mail fraud, and making a false statement to the VA.

According to court documents, during a three-year period, Persicano, 63, of St. Petersburg, Florida, concealed his income and employment status from the VA and thereby fraudulently obtained more than \$70,000 in disability benefits from the agency's Preferred Pension Program.

On Monday of this week, U.S. District Judge James D. Whittemore, sentenced Catherine Rodriguez, 37, of Tampa, Florida, to six months' imprisonment and ordered her to pay \$30,000 in restitution to the VA.

Court records indicate that Rodriguez, a manager for the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital Canteen, stole more than \$30,000 from that store and falsified cash register records and other receipts to conceal her crime.

The cases were investigated by the VA Program Fraud Task Force. The Task Force, formed to combat fraud upon the United States government, is comprised of Special Agents from the Office of Inspector General, Department of Veterans Affairs;

Office of Inspector General, Social Security Administration; Office of Inspector General, Department of Housing and Urban Development; and a Postal Inspector. The cases were prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Robert Mosakowski.