



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
District of Maryland
Northern Division*

*Allen F. Loucks
United States Attorney*

*Vickie E. LeDuc
Public Information Officer*

*36 South Charles Street
Fourth Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21201*

*410-209-4800
TTY/TDD:410-962-4462
410-209-4885
FAX 410-962-3091
Vickie.LeDuc@usdoj.gov*

**March 23, 2005
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:
VICKIE E. LEDUC, AUSA
(410) 209-4885**

**CARETAKER OF ELDERLY PLEADS GUILTY TO
FINANCIAL FRAUD CONSPIRACY**

GREENBELT, Maryland - United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Allen F. Loucks announced that today Geraldine Wooten, age 68, of Forestville, Maryland, and Sylvester Butler, age 61, of Arlington, Virginia, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. in connection with a scheme to defraud elderly individuals Wooten worked for as a caretaker as well as various financial institutions.

According to agreed statements of facts presented to the court as part of their guilty pleas, from June 2003 to July 2004 Wooten worked as a caretaker for Rebecca Halley, a 96 year old woman. Wooten knew that Ms. Halley was a vulnerable victim due to Ms. Halley's age and physical infirmities. As Ms. Halley's personal caretaker, Wooten had full access to Ms. Halley's home, mail, social security number and date of birth, financial records, and personal effects. During the period of her employment and continuing after she was terminated, Wooten conspired with Butler to defraud Ms. Halley and various financial institutions by (i) making unauthorized purchases for their benefit using credit and debit cards issued to Ms. Halley; (ii) using Ms. Halley's

identification information without her knowledge or consent to open bank accounts and credit and debit card accounts with various financial institutions, and then using those bank accounts and credit and debit cards to make unauthorized purchases; (iii) using Ms. Halley's identification information without her knowledge or consent to obtain vehicle loans; and (iv) fraudulently writing out checks on Ms. Halley's bank accounts, and forging Ms. Halley's signature on such checks. To conceal these transactions, Wooten caused statements for the fraudulent accounts to be mailed to Wooten's own residential address, where Butler resided as well. The actual loss to Ms. Halley and various financial institutions resulting from this scheme to defraud is \$85,794.24.

Additionally, according to the agreed statement of facts, Wooten, beginning in 1998 and continuing to June 5, 2001, worked as a personal caregiver for Estelle Esenstad. As the caregiver for Ms. Esenstad, who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease, Wooten had access to Ms. Esenstad's home, mail, social security number and date of birth, financial records, and personal effects. Wooten used this information to open credit card accounts, which Wooten then used to make unauthorized purchases for Wooten and members of Wooten's family. Wooten also used Ms. Esenstad's identification information to purchase, without Ms. Esenstad's knowledge or consent, real property located in Stone Mountain, Georgia. Wooten placed utility bills for this residence in Ms. Esenstad's name and maintained a post office box in Georgia in Ms. Esenstad's name to conceal Wooten's fraudulent purchase of the residence. Wooten also used other nominee owners to conceal her fraudulent purchase of this residence. In addition, Wooten fraudulently wrote out checks on Ms. Esenstad's bank accounts, and forged Ms. Esenstad's signature on such checks. The actual loss to Ms. Esenstad and various financial institutions resulting from this conduct is \$64,227.32.

The defendants face a maximum sentence of five years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000. Wooten has agreed to forfeit \$150,021.56, as well as the residence

in Stone Mountain, Georgia and three automobiles, to Ms. Halley, the estate of Ms. Esenstad, and various financial institutions. Butler has agreed to forfeit \$85,794.24 to Ms. Halley and various financial institutions.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, assisted by the Social Security Administration, and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Steven M. Dunne and Donna C. Sanger.