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**FORMER DIRECTOR OF ARCHIVES OF THE MARINERS' MUSEUM PLEADS GUILTY  
TO TAX FRAUD AND THE THEFT AND UNLAWFUL SALE OF MUSEUM PROPERTY**

(Newport News, Virginia) – Lester F. Weber, age 46, of Newport News, Virginia, pled guilty yesterday to one count of mail fraud, one count of making and subscribing a false tax return and one count of theft from an organization receiving federal funds, in connection with his theft and subsequent sale of property from The Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia. Chuck Rosenberg, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, made the announcement after Weber's plea was accepted by United States District Judge Rebecca Beach Smith.

The Mariners' Museum, which receives annual federal funding, collects, preserves and displays maritime related objects and documents. According to court documents and proceedings, Weber was employed by The Mariners' Museum as an archivist from 2000 through September 2006. Weber was promoted to Director of Archives in March of 2006. In such capacity, Weber had archival and custodial duties for various types of historical nautical materials, including brochures, documents and pictures.

From approximately 2002 through September 2006, Lester F. Weber and his wife, Lori E. Childs, a co-defendant in this case, operated a home based business that sold maritime and other collectible items on the eBay auction website. Weber and Childs sold approximately \$162,959.23 in merchandise on the eBay website from January 2002 through September 2006. Weber and Childs received the proceeds of the eBay sales by check, PayPal transfer, money order and Western Union. Weber and Childs filed U.S. Individual Income Tax Returns, which failed to list any of the receipts earned through the sale of items on the eBay website.

The Mariners' Museum was the owner of a collection of documents and materials, known as the Aks Collection, that was compiled by a mother and son who survived the sinking of the R.M.S. Titanic in 1912. The Mariners' Museum completed the purchase of this collection in 2001 and paid \$80,000 for the collection. In 2001, the museum transferred the Aks Collection to the custody of the Archives department, where Lester F. Weber worked and had access. The investigation revealed that during the course of his employment with the museum, Weber fraudulently obtained a number items from the museum's collections, including documents from the Aks Collection, and sold them on the eBay website. Weber then sent these documents to purchasers through use of the United States Mail. From the sale of the stolen Aks Collection

documents alone, Weber received more than \$5,000.

Weber is scheduled to be sentenced on November 7, 2008. On the charge of mail fraud, he faces a maximum of twenty years in federal prison, followed by three years of supervised release, and the requirement of full restitution. On the charge of making and subscribing a false tax return, he faces a maximum term of three years in federal prison, followed by one year of supervised release. On the charge of theft from an organization receiving federal funds, he faces a maximum term of ten years in prison, followed by three years of supervised release and the requirement of full restitution.

This case was investigated by the United States Secret Service, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation, and the Newport News Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Brian J. Samuels prosecuted the case on behalf of the United States.

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