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June 13, 2008

**5 ROCKFORD MEN PLEAD GUILTY
TO FEDERAL ROBBERY AND FIREARMS CHARGES**

ROCKFORD -- PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; ANDREW L. TRAVER, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; PHILLIP J. NICOLOSI, Winnebago County State's Attorney; and CHET EPPERSON, Chief of the Rockford Police Department, today made the following announcement:

Five Rockford men charged in federal court in connection with a series of armed robberies at eight Rockford businesses between July 3, 2007 and August 2, 2007 have all pleaded guilty. The robberies were charged under the Hobbs Act, which prohibits robbery affecting interstate commerce. The five men are **CHARLES O. EUBANKS**, 20; **MICHAEL JACKSON**, 21; **THOMAS L. HAWKINS**, 22; **MARTEL D. MULLINS**, 20; and **MARK O. COOPER**, 21. The defendants pled guilty to the following charges:

CHARLES O. EUBANKS pled guilty on June 4, 2008 to robbing the Englewood Beauty Supply located at 515 Marchesano Drive on July 31, 2007, as well as the Soto's Jewelry store located at 1126 South Main Street on August 2, 2007. Eubanks also pled guilty to one count of using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence. As part of his plea agreement, Eubanks also stipulated that he robbed the Victory Lane Auto Sales at 2805 11th Street on July 20, 2007, and the RB's Auto Sales at 2701 11th Street on July 27, 2007. Eubanks is set to be sentenced on September 22, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.

MICHAEL JACKSON pled guilty on May 14, 2008 to robbing the Englewood Beauty Supply located at 515 Marchesano Drive on July 31, 2007, as well as the Soto's Jewelry store located at 1126 South Main Street on August 2, 2007. Jackson also pled guilty to one count of using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence. As part of his plea agreement, Jackson also stipulated that he robbed the West State Food Mart at 2907 West State Street on July 3, 2007, and the Soto's Jewelry store another time, on July 13, 2007. Jackson is set to be sentenced on August 28, 2008 at 9:00 a.m.

THOMAS L. HAWKINS pled guilty on May 16, 2008 to robbing the Chase 8 Auto Sales located at 1711 Broadway on July 7, 2007, as well as the Victory Lane Auto Sales located at 2805 11th Street on July 20, 2007. Hawkins also pled guilty to one count of using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence. As part of his plea agreement, Hawkins also stipulated that he robbed the West State Food Mart at 2907 West State Street on July 3, 2007, and the Checks for Cash store at 2949 11th Street on July 16, 2007. Hawkins is set to be sentenced on September 4, 2008 at 10:00 a.m.

MARTEL D. MULLINS pled guilty on May 22, 2008 to robbing the West State Food Mart at 2907 West State Street on July 3, 2007, and to one count of using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence. Mullins is set to be sentenced on August 28, 2008 at 10:00 a.m.

MARK O. COOPER pled guilty today to robbing the Soto's Jewelry store located at 1126 South Main Street on August 2, 2007, as well as to using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence. Cooper is set to be sentenced on September 22, 2008 at 10:30 a.m.

All of the defendants face a potential total maximum penalty of life imprisonment, as well as a fine of up to \$500,000, between 3 and 5 years of supervised release following their release from prison, and any restitution ordered by the court. The defendants' actual sentences will be determined by United States District Judge Philip G. Reinhard, guided by the United States Sentencing Guidelines. All five defendants have been in custody since their arrests.

First charged by the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Office under state law, these defendants were transferred to federal court where they were charged under tough federal firearms laws as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an intensive, cooperative effort between local, state, and federal law enforcement to attack gun crimes. The cornerstone of the program is that every defendant charged in state court for an offense involving a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution in order to obtain the harshest penalties for the worst offenders. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov.

The case was investigated by Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and detectives of the Rockford Police Department. The case is being prosecuted in federal court by Assistant United States Attorney Michael F. Iasparro.

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