

OFFICE OF DAKOTA COUNTY ATTORNEY
JAMES C. BACKSTROM
COUNTY ATTORNEY



Dakota County Judicial Center
1560 Highway 55
Hastings, Minnesota 55033-2392
Phillip D. Prokopowicz, Chief Deputy
Karen A. Schaffer, First Assistant
Monica Jensen, Community Relations Director

Telephone
(651) 438-4438
FAX: (651) 438-4479 (Civil Division)
FAX: (651) 438-4500 (Criminal Division)
FAX: (651) 438-4499 (Juvenile/Admin Division)
E-mail: attorney@co.dakota.mn.us

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NEWS RELEASE

CHARGES FILED IN COLD CASE KIDNAPPING FROM WEST ST. PAUL

Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom announced that Che Lamar Romero, age 40, currently residing in federal prison in California, has been charged* with four counts of Kidnapping in connection with two separate incidents in West St. Paul in 2002:

On September 3, 2002, a 27-year-old female victim who worked at a jewelry store in West St. Paul was kidnapped by a man at gunpoint from her White Bear Lake home. She had first been confronted by two men in a car in the parking lot of the jewelry store after closing the store for the day, but these men drove off when a friend of the victim approached. She was driven back to the jewelry store and what she described as a bomb in a black box was handcuffed to her wrist. She was told to open the store and return with expensive diamonds. She did as she was told and gave over \$200,000 worth of diamonds, other jewelry and cash to the man who had kidnapped her. Her assailant then drove her to South St. Paul, removed the handcuffs and black box, and dropped her off in a dark area. The victim's car and cell phone were also stolen.

On the morning of November 1, 2002, a 45-year-old female victim who worked at a check cashing business on Robert Street in West St. Paul was approached as she arrived for work by a man seemingly holding a Federal Express package. The man displayed a gun and then attached a device around her neck that appeared to be some type of transmitter making a loud beeping noise. She was told she would be blown up if she did not do as she was told. She was instructed to go inside and get all the money from the safe and till. She was also instructed to get the money from the armored vehicle when the cash for the day was delivered. She did as she was instructed and handed over \$62,000 in cash to her assailant, who then drove her to a location in South St. Paul, removed the device from around her neck and released her.

On April 23, 2003, Che Lamar Romero was arrested in Mankato in an attempted robbery of a jewelry store. In this incident, Romero and another man attempted to abduct a female employee from the store, but she was able to get away from them and call the police. Romero and the other man were arrested following a police chase. A black box with wires, lights and tubes connected inside it were recovered from the car driven by these individuals. The black box was believed to be a bomb, but was later determined to be a fake explosive device. The black box with the word "Brinks" on the outside matched the black box which had been handcuffed to the first victim in West St. Paul during the September 3, 2002 incident. This box had been visible in a surveillance video of the West St. Paul jewelry store. Romero was convicted in federal court for the attempted robbery in Mankato and has been in custody at a California Federal Prison since 2003. He is currently scheduled to be released from federal prison in 2023.

Additional facts pertaining to these charges are contained in the criminal complaint available at <http://services.co.dakota.mn.us/ComplaintSearch>.

Backstrom commented: "These were violent crimes committed in our community and we are pleased to file charges after seven years. The filing of these charges is the result of good old fashioned police investigation work completed by the West St. Paul Police Department. We unfortunately cannot file charges for aggravated robbery in this instance because the statute of limitations has lapsed. Under Minnesota law, there is no statute of limitations for kidnapping."

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Chief Bud Shaver of West St. Paul stated: "I am proud of the work of Investigator Shawna Curtis, who took the investigation and ran with it. This case could not have been brought to a close without the cooperation and assistance provided to our department by the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and especially Special Agent Andy Hromyak. The most important aspect of the case is bringing closure to the two female victims and their families to allow them to get on with their lives."

Backstrom also praised the work of agents from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives who assisted in solving these cases.

If you have questions, contact James Backstrom at 651-438-4440.

**Criminal charges are not evidence of guilt. A defendant/suspect is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.*