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Defendant Pleads Guilty for Role in Golden Town Buffet Identity Theft Scam



ALBANY, NY- District Attorney P. David Soares announced today that PHENG SATHONGOTH, 42, of Manhattan, New York, pleaded guilty to (1) Count of Identity Theft in the First Degree, a Class D Felony, before the Honorable Stephen Herrick in Albany County Court this morning.

On August 5, 2013 the Bethlehem Police, United States Secret Service, United States Department of Homeland Security, New York State Police, and other local law enforcement agencies executed a search warrant pursuant to an identity theft investigation at the Golden Town Buffet on Route 9W in the Town of Bethlehem.

The search warrant did uncover that SATHONGOTH, acting in concert with others, used stolen credit card numbers and identities to purchase thousands of dollars' worth of merchandise. One employee, HENG LI, 27, of Brooklyn, did use a credit card skimmer device to obtain personal identification information of 39 credit card numbers by fraudulent pretenses.

LI also was in possession of a forged Michigan driver's license and under an active deportation order at the time of the search warrant execution, as were three other employees that were present at the restaurant at that time.

SATHONGOTH faces 2 1/3 to 7 years in State Prison when sentenced on April 28, 2014. He must also pay \$5,901.55 in restitution to his victims and remains in the Albany County Correctional Facility without bail to await sentencing.

On December 11, 2013, HENG LI was sentenced to 2 1/3 to 7 years in State Prison after pleading guilty to (1) Count of Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, a Class D Felony, and (1) Count of Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree, a Class E Felony, before the Honorable Stephen Herrick in Albany County Court.

"This case was about stolen identities but it was also about the breakdown of trust. When people patronize an eatery, they do so with the trust that their credit cards will not be tampered with. This restaurant hadn't been open for a year and dozens of people were victimized. I want to thank the Bethlehem Police Department along with the United States Secret Service, the United States Department of Homeland Security and the New York State Police for working so hard to bring these people to justice and in doing so restoring the public confidence," commented District Attorney Soares.

This case is being prosecuted by Bureau Chief of the Financial Crimes Unit Daniel Lynch.

For more information please contact Cecilia Walsh (518) 275-4710.

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