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CHARLESTON COUPLE SENTENCED FOR MAJOR MAIL FRAUD SCHEME

Admitted to Stealing Nearly \$80,000 Worth of Merchandise and Selling the Items on eBay

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – United States Attorney R. Booth Goodwin II today announced that a Charleston couple was sentenced in federal court for their roles in a conspiracy to commit mail fraud after stealing retail merchandise valued at nearly \$80,000. Lisa A. Knotts, 33, and husband, Ross A. Knotts, 42, both of Charleston, were each sentenced by United States District Judge Thomas E. Johnston to three months in prison, to be followed by a three-year term of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$78,530 in restitution. The couple previously pleaded guilty to the charges in September of last year.

“This was not an isolated incident. It was not simply to make ends meet,” said U.S. Attorney Booth Goodwin, who is handling the prosecution. “These defendants traveled interstate, used eBay and the U.S. Mails more than 900 times, and used their children in a significant criminal enterprise.”

The convictions stem from a thorough investigation conducted by the United States Postal Inspection Service which revealed that the pair routinely traveled to various Target Corporation (“Target”) stores located in West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana to shoplift items which included diabetic test strips, computer accessories and other expensive retail items. Court documents also revealed that the two defendants were frequently accompanied during these shoplifting activities by their children, who were minors at the time. In an effort to conceal their theft, the couple would instruct the minors to assist with hiding merchandise in their shopping carts and child strollers.

At sentencing, the Judge characterized the couple’s conduct as “unfortunate and immoral” by choosing to use their children in their crime. In addressing the pair, the Judge stated that their children were equally victimized by their conduct. Taking into account the safety and security of the children, the Court allowed each defendant to serve their prison term separately. The Court ordered Ross Knott to report to the custody of the United States Marshal on January 17, 2011. Lisa Knotts will be allowed to begin serving her sentence following her husband’s release.

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