

Food stamp fraud

Oakland County residents face federal charges

By Wayne Paal
staff writer

Nearly three dozen people, including Wayne and Oakland County residents, are expected to be charged this week in a crackdown on food stamp fraud.

State and federal agents worked together on the food stamp investigation, billed as one of the largest operations of its kind in U.S. history. Gov. John Engler and police officials, however, took pains to differentiate between those involved in the alleged fraud and other food stamp recipients.

"The people of Michigan can be assured their hard earned tax dollars will be used for people who legitimately need these services," Engler said, announcing investigation results Tuesday at the Michigan State Police Criminal Investigation Center in Livonia.

THOSE ARRAIGNED Tuesday included: Bahir Bahoura of West Bloomfield and Basil Kashat of Southfield. Others, including a Troy man and a Livonia man, were expected to be arraigned Wednesday.

Bahoura was among those identified as an owner or employee of the various Detroit-based food markets targeted in the investigation.

Additional suspects are expected to be arrested throughout this week, state Attorney General Frank Kelley said.

Prosecutors from the attorney general's office are withholding names of others arrested, as well as the stores where they conducted business, pending arraignment.

Assistant attorney general Theodore Klimaszewski said the final list of those charged could include other suburbanites as well as Detroit residents.

Those charged are expected to include "traffickers" — those who buy food stamps from needy people and then sell them to merchants — as well as merchants who buy the tainted food stamps.

Traffickers pay as little as 60 cents on the dollar for food stamps before selling them to merchants who pay as much as 80 cents on the dollar. Merchants then are reimbursed by state government for the full dollar, police said.

Food stamp recipients who sold their stamps to traffickers might lose benefits, but MSP officials said they weren't primary investigation targets.

"The thrust of this is the traffickers and merchants, not food stamp recipients themselves," MSP director Mike Robinson said.

The maximum penalty for food stamp fraud is 20 years in prison for repeat offenders.

Perhaps smarting from public criticism over general assistance welfare cuts, Engler administration officials said the crackdown sting was designed to restore public confidence in the food stamp program.

TEN PERCENT of all Michigan families receive food stamps, according to state records.

The number of recipients involved with fraud is "very small, less than 1 percent," according to state Department of Social Services Director Gerald Miller.

The food stamp investigation also involved the U.S. Secret Service and Department of Agriculture, as well as the state liquor control commission, bureau of lottery and department of public health, among other agencies.

At the same time, the DSS has established a welfare fraud hot line, 1-800-222-8558. DSS employees will man the special telephone line from 8:30 a.m. to noon and 1-4:30 p.m. weekdays. Every report will be investigated, Miller said.

City/suburban students meet in 9th New Detroit exchange

Some 350 students from public, private and parochial metro-area schools are expected at the ninth City/Suburban High School Conference and Exchange Tuesday and Wednesday at the University of Detroit Mercy Conference Center, 8200 West Outer Drive, Detroit.

The program, sponsored by New Detroit Inc., attempts to help students from nearly 60 greater Detroit schools close the knowledge gap between city and suburb. Students are divided into several small groups and attend workshops and discussions headed by trained adult and student facilitators. There is also a discussion group made up of teachers and counselors.

Tuesday's opening session features activities on how students can work together to eliminate cultural and racial stereotyping. In the afternoon

session, conference participants will gather into different breakout groups and participate in a nationally noted simulation on cross-cultural communications. The simulation involves role playing and adaptation to different cultural languages and mores. Paired schools will have an opportunity to establish dates for future exchanges around school activities.

Participating students will be asked for their evaluations of the conference.

The Write Stuff

With the propensity for misplaced pens, purchasing a premium pen is predominantly postulated to be prohibitive. One might potentially predetermine the prolonged pontification of this point to be pedantic. But, when your pen possesses a propensity for perfection, a predisposition for prolonged performance and a prudent price tag, you may perceive a profound improvement in your penmanship. And that's precisely the point of the right pen.



MONTBLANC

Silvers

Palace pays for police substation on premises

The Auburn Hills Police Department has a place of its own at The Palace.

The department opened Substation No. 1 inside The Palace for the Detroit Pistons' season-opening game against the Milwaukee Bucks last week.

Designed to provide a permanent center of operations for facility and traffic patrols during events, the fully equipped substation is situated on the arena level.

Featuring a radio dispatch system which includes a new transmitter at the top of the arena, the substation

will serve as the department's communication center during events.

The radio system installed at The Palace can be utilized as an emergency back-up to the city's main dispatch center. The substation will also be used for pre-event meeting and planning, employee breaks and booking procedures. The substation also includes a holding area.

Previously, officers assigned to duties during events shared quarters in The Palace's crowd control office. All construction costs of the new facility were paid for by The Palace.

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