

Worcester business owner pleads guilty to defrauding SNAP of \$282,541

The owner of Esther's Fashion Paradise in Worcester pleaded guilty yesterday in federal court to defrauding the SNAP benefits program and selling counterfeit merchandise.

Esther Acquaye, 31, of Worcester, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to acquire, possess, and redeem SNAP benefits in an unauthorized manner, and to convert public money; one count of SNAP fraud; and one count of trafficking in counterfeit goods. U.S. District Court Judge Timothy S. Hillman scheduled sentencing for March 7, 2018.

On numerous occasions between November 2013 and April 2016, Acquaye, the owner of Esther's Fashion Paradise in Worcester, accepted EBT cards from SNAP recipients wishing to exchange their SNAP benefits for cash. Specifically, Acquaye passed the EBT cards through a point-of-sale terminal causing the full value of the SNAP benefits to be electronically transferred to her business, and then provided less than the full value of the SNAP benefits in cash to the SNAP recipients. In total, Acquaye caused approximately \$282,541 in fraudulent EBT transactions and SNAP benefits to be transacted at Esther's.

In addition, on at least four occasions between November 2015 and March 2016, Acquaye accepted an EBT card from an undercover investigator as payment for counterfeit retail goods. Acquaye sold the investigator two counterfeit Michael Kors purses, one counterfeit Gucci purse, one counterfeit The North Face jacket, and one counterfeit Michael Kors wallet.

The charge of conspiracy provides for a sentence of no greater than five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$250,000. The charge of SNAP fraud provides for

a sentence of no greater than 20 years in prison, three years of supervised release, and a fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain/loss, whichever is greater. The charge of trafficking in counterfeit goods provides for a sentence of no greater than 10 years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of \$2 million. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Former State Senator Brian Joyce Arrested and Charged in Federal Indictment

Brian Augustine Joyce, a former Massachusetts State Senator, was arrested this morning by federal authorities for allegedly using his state senate office for private gain.

Joyce, 55, of Westport, Mass., was charged in a federal indictment unsealed today with racketeering, extortion, honest services fraud, money laundering, conspiracy to defraud the IRS, and other charges. The indictment alleges that Joyce secretly profited from his position as state senator by accepting a stream of concealed bribes and kickbacks in exchange for his official action on matters before the state legislature and for exerting pressure on and advising state and municipal officials to take official action on government matters. The indictment further alleges that Joyce employed sophisticated methods to conceal his corrupt acts, including using a shell company and other entities to launder proceeds from his bribery and kickback schemes and to conceal his ongoing criminal activities.

Specifically, the indictment alleges that Joyce agreed to use his official position to exert pressure on and advise Town Administrators to use a particular energy broker in return for kickbacks in the form of commissions to a shell company, which Joyce controlled. It is further alleged that Joyce used his official position to pressure and advise members of the Milton Planning Board to approve a property subdivision waiver that a developer sought, in exchange for a kickback. Joyce allegedly concealed the kickback by, among other things, falsely telling a Milton Planning Board member that he had not been paid by the developer, and by accepting payment from the developer in the form of a Jeep from one of the developer's car dealerships.

In addition, it is alleged that Joyce took official action, or pressured others to take official action, on behalf of a coffee-business franchise owner in exchange for hundreds of pounds of free coffee. Joyce took steps to conceal this by submitting backdated checks to the State Ethics Commission and instructed the franchise owner and his relative to falsely represent to the Ethics Commission that they had agreed to provide Joyce coffee in exchange for legal services.

According to the indictment, Joyce also exerted pressure on and advised officials at the Massachusetts Division of Insurance to take official action on matters in favor of an Energy Insurance Brokerage Company (EIB), who paid Joyce in exchange for his official assistance in promoting, sponsoring, and filing legislation that would benefit the EIB. The indictment also alleges that Joyce attempted to use his official position as state senator to collect money for "legal work" from representatives of a Philadelphia solar company who sought Joyce's assistance with local permitting and pending legislation.

Joyce is also charged with conspiring to defraud the IRS in connection with his purchase of more than \$470,000 in common stock from the EIB Company and falsely reporting the stock

purchase as a tax-exempt retirement account rollover in his personal tax return.

The charges of racketeering, mail fraud, wire fraud, honest services fraud and extortion provide for a sentence of no greater than 20 years in prison; the money laundering charges provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison; and the charge of fraud, misapplication involving federal funds provides for a sentence of no greater than 10 years in prison. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting United States Attorney William D. Weinreb; Harold H. Shaw, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Field Division; and Joel P. Garland, Special Agent in Charge of the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigation in Boston made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Dustin Chao and William F. Bloomer of Weinreb's Public Corruption and Special Prosecutions Unit are prosecuting the case.

The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

HIRED: City of New Bedford is hiring for an Asst. Public Access Director position

PAY: \$41,051 – \$51,318

Supervises programming, instruction and technical

responsibilities of the Channel 95 Public Access Station. Develops and conducts TV production classes, covering studio and field production and non-linear editing, for incoming community producers. Provides production guidance and technical assistance to community producers with studio and field production, and non-linear editing. Keeps accurate inventory of NBCN-95 equipment and media (completed programs and raw footage).

Associate's Degree (Bachelor's Degree preferred) in Communications/Media and at least two years of relevant experience. Prior public access employment experience a plus. Mandatory CORI (Criminal Offender Record Investigation) background check per City Council Ordinance effective May 14, 2013.

For application/complete job description, please visit www.newbedford-ma.gov or contact the Personnel Dept., 133 William St., Room 212, 508-979-1444. Applications will be accepted until a suitable candidate is found. New Bedford has a residency requirement. EEO

City of New Bedford has renewed its program to continue to cut electricity costs

The City of New Bedford will continue its electricity aggregation program under a new three-year supply contract set to start in January 2018.

New Bedford is part of a buying group of 23 communities stretching from the South Coast to northern Middlesex County that originally launched their Community Electricity Aggregation (CEA) programs in January 2016. By purchasing together, these communities have collectively saved over \$8 million for their residents to date and have now renewed their supply contracts for another three years. New Bedford's savings for homeowners and businesses was \$1,076,863.

New Bedford's partners include two dozen cities and towns across the region: Acushnet, Attleboro, Carver, Dartmouth, Dedham, Dighton, Douglas, Dracut, Fairhaven, Fall River, Freetown, Marion, Mattapoisett, New Bedford, Northbridge, Norton, Plainville, Rehoboth, Seekonk, Somerset, Swansea, Westford, and Westport. This Community Electricity Aggregation buying group is the largest in Massachusetts and the third largest of its kind in the country.

In addition to savings, in an environment of continuing rate volatility, these aggregation programs have successfully provided safe harbor for rate payers with one fixed rate while maintaining the freedom to leave the program at any time without penalty. The goals of the program are to provide ratepayers with reduced electric rates, price stability and a responsible alternative to utility rates.

The new electric rate is fixed at \$0.10122 per kilowatt hour (kWh) from January 2018 to January 2021. This compares favorably with the Basic Service rate for Eversource from January 1, 2018 to June 30, 2018 which will be \$0.13157 per kWh.

The electricity supply will be provided by Public Power, LLC. Public Power won a highly competitive bid conducted by consultant Good Energy in April 2017, beating out two of the nation's largest power companies. The supplier name will change from Constellation to Public Power and this will be reflected along with the new rate of \$0.10122 per kilowatt

hour on your January 2018 bill which you will receive in February 2018.

While the aggregation rate compares favorably with the winter rate of Eversource, there is no guarantee of future savings under the aggregation program. The Eversource Basic Service supply rate changes every six months.

- If you are currently in the program, no action is required to continue participation.
- If you have opted out of the original program, you may still join the program by contacting Public Power, LLC at 800-830-2944, or by email at customercare@ppandu.com.
- If you are on the Basic Service with Eversource and have not previously opted out, you will be sent a letter that details the program.
- Residents who wish to join the program (including residents who previously opted out or who are currently with a third-party supplier) may still join the program by contacting Public Power, LLC at 800-830-2944, or by email at customercare@ppandu.com. Please note that residents currently on with a third-party supplier should check for any early termination fees associated with their existing supply contract prior to joining the new program.

Residents are advised that no one affiliated with the program will call, email or knock on residents' doors asking them to enroll or re-enroll. As before, there is no penalty or termination fee for leaving the program at any time.

About Community Electricity Aggregation (CEA):

As communities across the country have sought to take more control over their energy costs and usage, Community

Electricity Aggregation has become increasingly popular. In Massachusetts, CEA is also known as “municipal aggregation” and was made possible by utility deregulation in the late 1990s. CEA is a process whereby a municipality or, in this case, multiple municipalities, aggregate the electrical load of residents and businesses within their jurisdictional boundaries to purchase electricity in bulk in the competitive market.

The CEA program does not affect the delivery of electric service. Any problems with electric service, including outages, should continue to be reported to Eversource at 800-592-2000.

For questions or concerns about the CEA program, or if you would like to opt out of or leave the program, please contact Public Power, LLC at (800) 830-2944, or email them at customercare@ppandu.com.

Visit www.masscea.com for additional information about the Community Electricity Aggregation program.

Faces Of New Bedford #132: Vernon Miles

Meet Vernon Miles, 38-year-old Area Sales Manager for Caliber Home Loans.



Vernon originally grew up in Central Massachusetts, but moved out to the area for school. He ended up getting into banking as a teller for Fleet bank. He quickly moved up through the bank and got involved with business banking.

After being swindled during the purchase of his first home, he decided to learn more about mortgages, leading him into the lender business. He began working as a broker and after getting married, ventured into the business full-time. Vernon took his own personal experience and used that as the catalyst of helping educate people on home ownership, so they wouldn't make the same mistake that he had in the past.

After some time in the business, he was able to rise out of the recession in 2008, successfully growing the business he was working for and helping countless local families securely buy homes. Vernon also volunteers on several boards, including United Way and Junior Achievement. He has helped run the Titan Challenge at Umass Dartmouth with Junior Achievement, which helps high school sophomores win scholarship money by teaching them how to run businesses with a simulated game.

Recent, Vernon has taken the role of Area Sales Manager of Caliber Home Loans, the second-largest mortgage servicer in the country. He is excited as this company, which is new to

the area, is going to open up access to all new loan programs to current and potential local home owners, not previously offered by any other company.

Faces of New Bedford is a project by Colton Simmons. If you are interested in booking a shoot or getting prints from the series email all inquiries to colton@coltonsimmons.com.

Follow Colton on Instagram:
<https://instagram.com/simmonscolton>

Read more of the Faces of New Bedford series **here**.

Man sentenced for attempting to sexually exploit two minors over X-Box Live

An Illinois man was sentenced yesterday in federal court in Springfield for attempting to sexually exploit two minors.

Zack Sawyer, 32, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Mark G. Mastroianni to 15 years in prison and 15 years of supervised release. In June 2017, Sawyer pleaded guilty to two counts of attempted sexual exploitation of minors.

Around May 2010, Sawyer used X-Box Live to contact a 12-year-old boy and a 13-year-old boy in Hampshire County, Mass., and asked them both to send him nude photographs. According to the statement of facts, when the first boy refused, Sawyer threatened to rape and kill him. Sawyer then asked the second boy, and when he, too, refused, Sawyer again threatened rape,

adding that he had a drug that would paralyze people.

The government told the court that Sawyer also enticed a third boy in Loudon County, Va., and asked him to pose for a sexually explicit picture over the internet. Sawyer met the boy while playing the online game Minecraft. Sawyer sent a sexually explicit picture of himself to the boy, and Sawyer continued to ask the boy for sexually explicit videos.

Acting United States Attorney William D. Weinreb; United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, Dana J. Boente; Colonel Kerry A. Gilpin, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police; and Michael Shea, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Boston, made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorney Alex J. Grant of Weinreb's Springfield Branch Office and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Prabhu of Boente's Cybercrime Unit prosecuted the case.

The case is brought as part of Project Safe Childhood. In 2006, the Department of Justice created Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from exploitation and abuse. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the DOJ's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov/.

WOW! New Bedford moving into

old Flagship Cinemas building

Per their Facebook page, "WOW! New Bedford will soon move to a completely remodeled and modern new space in King's Crossing, directly behind our current location, in the old Flagship Cinemas building."

Brockton man faces 19 charges after struggle with police

A Brockton man in possession of a loaded gun and drugs struggled violently with Massachusetts State Troopers during the overnight hours after one of the Troopers stopped the man's car on Route 95 northbound in Dedham. The suspect began a violent struggle after Troopers got him out of the car and found illegal narcotics on him.

After Troopers located a plastic bag believed to contain suboxone in the driver's pants pocket, the driver jumped back into his car, put it into gear, and began to drive away as Sgt. Walter Foley and Trooper Michael Murphy jumped into the car on top of him to subdue him and stop the car. The suspect, driving a 2000 Buick Century, drove about 12 yards with the Sergeant and Trooper hanging onto the outside of the car, struggling with the suspect, before the Trooper was able to bump the car into neutral, step on the brakes, and remove the keys from the ignition.



The driver, a 30-year-old Brockton resident, continued to violently resist the Troopers attempts to subdue him. At two points during the struggle, a Trooper deployed his department-issued Taser in drive-stun mode in attempt to subdue the suspect before the confrontation escalated further. The Sergeant and Trooper were finally able to pin the driver onto the car's passenger seat and get him into handcuffs.

With the suspect cuffed and back outside his car, Troopers again conducted a pat frisk and located what they believed, through training and experience, to be another suspicious package concealed under his clothing near his buttocks. The driver's began resisting again in an apparent attempt to prevent the Troopers from removing the package he was concealing. After another struggle Sgt. Foley was able to remove the package, which was found to contain an off-white rock-like substance in a clear plastic bag. The Troopers, through their training and experience, believed the substance to be cocaine, which was later weighed to be approximately 28 grams.

During an inventory search of the car the suspect had been driving, Troopers located a black, zip-style bag directly behind the driver's seat and within easy reach of the driver. Inside the bag was a fully-loaded silver Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum handgun, along with four individually wrapped bags of a green vegetable matter believed, through the Troopers' training and experience, to be marijuana. Troopers determined that the driver does not possess a license to carry a firearm.

Trooper Murphy had stopped the Buick Century at approximately 2:17 a.m. after he observed that it did not have an inspection sticker. Upon initially approaching the Century, Trooper Murphy identified the driver, and made observations that led him to determine the driver was operating a motor vehicle while impaired. Troopers also took a pocket knife from the driver's possession.

The driver refused medical attention following his arrest.

Trooper Murphy transported the driver to State Police Framingham Barracks, where he was booked on the following charges:

1. Carrying a loaded firearm;
2. Carrying a firearm while intoxicated;
3. Committing a firearm violation with one prior violent or drug crime;
4. Possession of a firearm without a Firearm Identification Card;
5. Possession of ammunition without a Firearm Identification Card;
6. Assault and battery on a police officer (two counts);
7. Assault and battery with a dangerous weapon (two counts);
8. Possession of a firearm during a felony;
9. Resisting Arrest (two counts);
10. Improper storage of a firearm;
11. Possession of a Class B narcotic with intent to distribute;
12. Possession of a Class B narcotic, subsequent offense;
13. Possession of a Class D substance with intent to distribute, subsequent offense;
14. Trafficking in cocaine;
15. Operating under the influence of drugs;
16. Possession of an open container of marijuana;
17. Carrying a dangerous weapon (pocket knife);
18. Disorderly conduct; and
19. Driving a vehicle with no inspection sticker.

A bail clerk set the driver's bail at \$500,000. He was expected to be arraigned today in Dedham District Court.

Eight youngsters graduate from New Bedford Police Junior Police Academy

The New Bedford Police Department is proud to present the eight graduates of the Junior Police Academy, who officially graduated from the program Dec. 6. Congratulations to Kalil Grady; Janpier Medina; Dalante Pelletier; Angelina Ptaszenski; Craig Ptaszenski Jr; Joseph Rebello; Shandaliz Rivera and Jacob Spooner.

The Drill Instructor's Award, which is awarded to given to the recruit who gives 100% effort 100% of the time, was presented to Janpier Medina. The Academy Director's Award was given to Kyle Medina, Janpier's older brother. Kyle was not an academy participant but received the award because for every class he rode his bicycle from the north end of the city, escorting his brother to the program and then remaining on site the entire time so that he could escort him back home.

Parents, guardians and friends attended the graduation to cheer on the youngsters for their accomplishments. After the ceremony, refreshments were served courtesy of Domino's Pizza.

The Junior Police Academy program began Oct. 4 and gave boys and girls ages 11-13 the chance to receive an inside look at the New Bedford Police Department. Academy members learned about a variety of law enforcement and safety-related topics, including crime scene investigation, radar detection, potential dangers of social media, rope climbing, first aid and CPR and police canine deployment. Participants also rode on a port security vessel and wore specially designed goggles to simulate the effects of impaired driving.

The academy was led by Sgt. Pamela Melo, supervisor of the Family Services Unit. Instructors were Detectives David Brown,

Dominique Sherburne, Alberto Silva and Stephen Taylor of the Family Services Unit.

Police Chief Joseph Cordeiro and Capt. Amos Melo began the academy in 2000 when they were a lieutenant and sergeant respectively. The academy ran through 2006 before being reintroduced this year.

Coast Guard Heritage Museum in Barnstable

Have you bee to the Coast Guard Heritage Museum in Barnstable? We had a chance to stop by and get a tour of the museum dedicated to the amazing men and women who served.

The Coast Guard Heritage Museum is part of the The Cape Cod Museum Trail brought to you by First Citizens' Federal Credit Union.

More: <http://capecodmuseumtrail.com>