

Two former Ebay employees plead guilty to aggressive cyberstalking campaign targeting Natick couple

Two former employees of eBay, Inc. pleaded guilty Thursday to their roles in a cyberstalking campaign targeting the editor and publisher of a newsletter that eBay executives viewed as critical of the company.

Stephanie Popp, 32, of San Jose, Calif., eBay's former Senior Manager of Global Intelligence, and Veronica Zea, 26, of San Jose, Calif., a former eBay contractor who worked as an intelligence analyst in eBay's Global Intelligence Center (GIC), pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit cyberstalking and conspiracy to tamper with witnesses. U.S. District Court Judge William G. Young scheduled sentencing for Feb. 25, 2021.

Popp and Zea were charged along with co-defendants Brian Gilbert, 51, of San Jose, Calif., a former Senior Manager of Special Operations for eBay's Global Security Team and Stephanie Stockwell, 26, of Redwood City, Calif., the former manager of eBay's GIC. Gilbert and Stockwell are scheduled to plead guilty on Oct. 29, 2020.

Former eBay executives, James Baugh and David Harville, were charged on June 15, 2020. Phil Cooke, another former member of eBay's Global Security Team, was also charged and is scheduled to plead guilty on Oct. 27, 2020.

According to the charging documents, the victims of the cyberstalking campaign were a Natick couple who are the editor and publisher of an online newsletter that covers ecommerce companies, including eBay. Members of the executive leadership team at eBay followed the newsletter's posts, often taking

issue with its content and the anonymous comments underneath the editor's stories.

It is alleged that in August 2019, after the newsletter published an article about litigation involving eBay, two members of eBay's executive leadership team sent or forwarded text messages suggesting that it was time to "take down" the newsletter's editor.

In response, Popp and Zea, and allegedly Baugh, Harville, Gilbert and Stockwell, executed a three-part harassment campaign. Among other things, several of the defendants allegedly ordered anonymous and disturbing deliveries to the victims' home, including a preserved fetal pig, a bloody pig Halloween mask, a funeral wreath, a book on surviving the loss of a spouse, and pornography addressed to the victims but delivered to their neighbor's homes. Zea used cash to purchase prepaid debit cards for use in the campaign and ordered insects to the victims' home.

As part of the second phase of the campaign, Popp sent private Twitter messages and public tweets, drafted or approved by Baugh, Gilbert, or Cooke, criticizing the newsletter's content and threatening to travel to the victims in Natick. The charging documents allege that Baugh, Gilbert, Popp and Cooke planned for these messages to become increasingly disturbing, culminating with "doxing" the victims (i.e., publishing their home address). It is alleged that the very same group intended to then have Gilbert, a former Santa Clara police captain, approach the victims with an offer to help stop the harassment that the defendants were secretly causing, in an effort to promote good will towards eBay, generate more favorable coverage in the newsletter, and identify the individuals behind the anonymous comments.

The third phase of the campaign allegedly involved covertly surveilling the victims in their home and community. According to the complaint, Harville and Zea registered for a software

development conference to explain their trip to Boston on Aug. 15, 2019. Baugh, Harville, and Zea (and later Popp) drove to the victims' home in Natick several times, with Harville and Baugh allegedly intending to break into the victims' garage and install a GPS tracking device on their car. As protection in the event if they were stopped by police, Baugh and Harville allegedly carried false documents purporting to show that they were investigating the victims as "Persons of Interest" who had threatened eBay executives. The victims spotted this surveillance, and notified the Natick Police Department who began investigating.

Aware that the police were investigating, the defendants allegedly sought to interfere with the investigation by lying about eBay's involvement while pretending to offer the company's assistance with the harassment. They also allegedly lied to eBay's lawyers and deleted digital evidence that showed their involvement.

The charges of conspiracy to commit cyberstalking and conspiracy to tamper with witnesses each carry a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release, a fine of up to \$250,000 and restitution. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

United States Attorney Andrew E. Lelling; Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Boston Field Division; and Natick Chief of Police James G. Hicks made the announcement today. eBay provided valuable assistance and cooperation with the federal investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Seth B. Kosto of Lelling's Securities, Financial and Cyber Fraud Unit is prosecuting the case.

The details contained in charging documents are allegations. The remaining defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of

law.