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Local Travel Agent Indicted for Stealing from Clients

TRENTON – A Mercer County grand jury returned two separate indictments last week charging the owner of Mercer Travel & Cruises with the theft of more than \$100,000, Mercer County Prosecutor Joseph L. Bocchini Jr. announced today.

In the first indictment, Luis C. Macres, 54, of Wyndham Place, Robbinsville, is charged with two counts of third-degree theft by failure to make required disposition. Third-degree crimes carry a maximum penalty of five years in state prison and a \$15,000 fine.

The case was referred to the prosecutor's Economic Crime Unit on October 7 by the Mercer County Division of Consumer Affairs. An investigation revealed that between April 20 and September 3, 2010, two Trenton women each made multiple cash payments to Macres for a five night/six day trip to Las Vegas in October. In total, each victim paid approximately \$800.

At the beginning of October, the women went to the travel agency, located on Front Street, but Macres could not provide any booking or confirmation information for the trip. It was then discovered that the victims' reservations had been canceled due to nonpayment. They asked for a full cash refund but Macres did not have the money on hand and asked them to return in two days.

Two days later, the victims went to Mercer Travel & Cruises but found the business closed. To date, neither woman has received a refund nor were they able to go on their planned vacation.

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The second indictment charges Macres with one count of second-degree theft by deception and one count of second-degree wrongful impersonation. Second-degree crimes carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in state prison and a \$150,000 fine.

Further investigation by the ECU revealed that between January 30 and October 19, 2010, Macres obtained property of multiple victims in excess of \$75,000. He also obtained personal identifying information pertaining to at least five individuals and used that information to make travel arrangements while pocketing the cash deposits.

In total, Macres owes more than 30 victims in excess of \$100,000.

Macres is free on \$75,000 bail set by Mercer County Superior Court Judge Pedro J. Jimenez. Macres was also required to surrender his passport.

Bocchini credited ECU Detective Russell and Trenton Police Detective Matt Halaycio with the investigation leading to the charges. He also thanked the Mercer County Division of Consumer Affairs for their valuable assistance.

Assistant Prosecutor James Scott, chief of the Economic Crime Unit, presented the cases to the grand jury.

Despite having been indicted, every defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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