Feb 13, 2019

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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Man Arrested for Using Stolen IDs in Elaborate Tax Deed Scam

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—The Florida Attorney General's Office and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement today arrested a man on charges related to using stolen identities to submit fraudulent claims for surplus tax deeds. The elaborate tax deed scheme occurred between August 2016 through January 2018. The crime spree spanned 10 counties, resulting in $871,264 in losses to individuals and businesses in Florida.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This elaborate plot to steal tax deed surplus money incorporated identity theft and forged documents across 10 Florida counties. According to the investigation, the defendant illegally posed as different individuals representing numerous businesses to claim money for properties that did not belong to him. We will continue to work with law enforcement to investigate and prosecute attempts to steal from Floridians using identity theft or any other illegal tactic."

Commissioner Richard Swearingen said, "Stephen White concocted a complicated and detailed scheme to dupe taxpayers. Fortunately, our agents uncovered this fraudulent activity and were able to arrest Mr. White today on several charges."

A tax deed disbursement occurs when a property owner fails to pay taxes after one year and the county clerk sells a tax certificate for the property. The buyer can then hold the certificate for three years and request a tax deed sale. The property goes to auction, and the proceeds from the sale are used to pay delinquent taxes. If additional funds remain, parties with interest in the property are notified to claim the surplus.

According to the investigation, Stephen Loftis White, 40, represented 10 different businesses that submitted 28 fraudulent claims for surplus tax deed disbursements throughout Florida. White requested a list of tax deed surpluses from county clerks or searched clerk of court websites using a fictitious name. White would sometimes reinstate an inactive business as part of his scheme. White included several documents to support the fraudulent submissions, including forged signatures on corporate assignment of mortgages, driver's license photos and W-9 taxpayer forms.

FDLE became aware of the defendant's criminal actions after receiving a complaint that the company, Green Tree Servicing, LLC, submitted fraudulent documents to obtain disbursements from the Brevard County Clerk of Court. Upon closer examination of the claim documents, the Brevard County Clerk of Court noted irregularities. Specifically, one assignment of mortgage transferred an interest in a previously recorded mortgage to Green Tree Servicing, with the witness signatures being indiscernible on the documents.

Green Tree Servicing turned out to be one of 10 other company names used by White to submit fraudulent claims, addressed throughout the state—the business was not complicit in the crimes. The businesses exploited in this scheme are:

· Beneficial Florida;
· Crystal Waters Development Company of Crystal River;
· Equicredit Cor of America;
· Fremont Investment and Loan Company;
· FUSO Polk County Property 135 LLC;
· Greenhope Inc.;
· Realtime Resolutions IC;
· Rosen & Chalmers PA; and
· Villa Terrace Living LLC.

The crimes occurred in Brevard, Charlotte, Citrus, Lake, Lee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota and St. Lucie. The defendant is charged with grand theft and criminal use of personal information of more than 10 people.

Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Robert Finkbeiner will handle the case.