

COUNTY

'Identity thief' given 105 months in prison in bank fraud case

Defendant stole mail to gain access to credit, bank accounts

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A 47-year-old "identity thief" who authorities said developed an illicit talent for stealing mail and using it to gain access to people's credit and savings accounts was sentenced yesterday to 105 months in federal prison.

Mark Gregory Young of Baltimore, described by prosecutors as a wily fraud artist who has been stealing people's identities for more than 25 years, stole more than 6,000 pieces of mail from North Baltimore mailboxes and postal trucks last year. At times, he dressed as a mailman to commit the thefts, prosecutors charged.

Young used the information from residents' credit card and bank statements to illegally withdraw more than \$47,000 in a four-month period, according to a statement of facts presented in U.S. District Court in Baltimore.

But the potential loss based on the credit accounts he accessed was \$878,000, a fact that Judge Catherine C. Blake took into account at the sentencing hearing.

"It's very disheartening that this skill and talent were turned in completely the wrong direction," the judge said. "True, it's not violent, but it has a severe impact on people's lives."

Among the victims of Young's scheme — which primarily targeted the well-to-do neighborhoods of Roland Park, Mount Washington and Rodgers Forge — was Edward C. Papenfuse, Maryland's state archivist. Young stole numerous letters from Papenfuse's mailbox in April 1997.

"Who would ever expect anyone to come up on your porch and steal your mail?" Papenfuse said at the two-day sentencing hearing. "What amazes me is how systematically and carefully he attacked our credit. ... He assailed my privacy, my integrity, and my identity."

Young cashed a \$3,500 credit card access check that he had stolen from Papenfuse's mailbox, persuading a NationsBank teller to accept it by presenting a fraudulent Arizona driver's license he had obtained in Papenfuse's name.

Credit union check

He also determined from the mail that Papenfuse was a member of the State Employees Credit Union of Maryland and manipu-

lated documents so that he could withdraw \$9,500 from the account, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Bonnie S. Greenberg.

The check for the \$9,500 was mailed to Papenfuse's address, but Young took it from the mailbox, prosecutors said.

"It was a very careful, planned operation," Papenfuse said. "He had to have been watching our house and our mail."

Another victim was 86-year-old John W. Kopper, a retired Johns Hopkins University electrical engineering professor, who told Blake that he found the ordeal to be an affront to his late wife. Young stole her credit card and bank statement.

"I was angered that someone would sign my deceased wife's name to rob a bank account of the money she had saved to help the education of our two grandchildren," Kopper said at the hearing. "This act of thievery upset me emotionally enough so that I had a second recurrence of a bleeding stomach ulcer."

Practiced signatures

One of Young's accomplices, a recovering cocaine and heroin addict who has pleaded guilty in the case but has not been sentenced, testified Tuesday that Young enticed her to cash stolen checks for him so that she could make money to support her drug habit.

Charlene M. Owens testified that Young would show her canceled checks he had stolen from people's mail and would make her practice the signatures, so it would look believable at the bank.

He also supplied her with a fake Hawaii driver's license.

"Being a drug addict, all I saw was dollar signs," she said.

Young often carried a briefcase containing documents and templates used for making phony identification cards, Owens said. Prosecutors seized the briefcase and the templates when Young was arrested in July 1997, after U.S. postal inspectors started investigating the lost mail.

Prosecutors said six postal trucks were broken into in North Baltimore and the Towson area.

Young was sentenced on his plea of guilty to federal charges of bank fraud, damaging a postal vehicle, and possession of document-making implements.

Young has 16 prior criminal convictions dating to 1970, all but two of which are for various types of identity theft, prosecutors said.

Young apologized in the courtroom to one of his victims yesterday and said that his actions ultimately caused most harm to himself.

"I believed the conduct I engaged in has harmed no one other than myself," Young said.