



News Releases

JULY 21, 2011
FLAGSTAFF, AZ

Flagstaff family indicted in forced labor scheme *Lengthy ICE-led investigation leads to arrest of wedding shop owners*



FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — Four members of a Flagstaff family are facing federal charges following their arrest Thursday for exploiting Vietnamese nationals for nearly a decade in an elaborate forced labor scheme at their I Do, I Do Wedding Shop in Flagstaff, Ariz.

The two-year, multi-agency investigation into the family's activities – led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) – involved at least five victims, now living throughout the United States. Thursday federal prosecutors unsealed a five-count indictment stemming from the investigation, dubbed "Operation Broken Promises," and served arrest warrants for the four Flagstaff defendants. Those charged in the case are: Huong Thi "Kelly" McReynolds, 58; Joseph Minh McReynolds, 36; Vincent Minh McReynolds, 32; and James Hartful McReynolds, 60.

According to the indictment, the McReynolds family brought the victims into the United States by offering them a better life, including assurances of marriage to U.S. citizens and educational opportunities. Shortly after the victims arrived, they discovered those were false promises. Instead, the

victims were forced to work long hours in the McReynolds' home and business with little or no pay.

"Huong Thi McReynolds and her family lured these victims to the United States on the promise of the American dream; what the victims got instead was indentured servitude," said U.S. Attorney Dennis K. Burke. "The defendants created a climate of fear inside their home and business by carrying firearms, berating the victims and threatening to physically harm them and shame their families in Vietnam. They weren't just exploited for their labor; they were robbed of their basic human dignity."

"Through fraud and coercion, the McReynolds family engaged in modern-day slavery to support their business and live an easy life on the backs of these exploited victims," said Matt Allen, special agent in charge of ICE HSI in Arizona. "Working with our partners at the FBI and Department of Labor, HSI was able to document nearly a decade of abuse perpetrated by these defendants, who will now face justice for their actions."

"Today's arrest of members of the McReynolds family is a culmination of efforts by our federal law enforcement partners," said James L. Turgal Jr., FBI special agent in charge, Phoenix. "When individuals are forced and exploited for their labor, it erodes our society's belief in the freedoms afforded to us under the laws of our nation. The FBI will continue to work with the law enforcement community to address this type of illegal activity and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice."

The indictment alleges that, beginning in September 2001, Huong McReynolds brought Vietnamese nationals to Flagstaff, where she and her family housed them and forced them to work seven days a week at the bridal shop. Until at least December 2008, Huong McReynolds and her two sons, Joseph and Vincent, compelled the victims to work long hours with little or no pay. Between September 2001 and December 2008, the Vietnamese workers cycled through the bridal shop, with their "employment" ending when they escaped or were "evicted."

Members of the McReynolds family, including Huong, Joseph and James, each married Vietnamese victims. The victims believed they would be entering legitimate marriages with the McReynolds family members. Huong McReynolds shepherded the victims through the visa process and coached them for their interviews at the consulate. Once the victims were in the United States, Huong McReynolds confiscated their passports and

identification, and informed them they would not only be working at her home, but also long hours in their bridal shop.

Despite their marriages to the victims, Huong McReynolds and James McReynolds, who divorced in 1996, continued to live together as husband and wife. Both before and after Joseph McReynolds' marriage to one of the Vietnamese victims, he was living with a U.S. citizen with whom he fathered children, both before and during his fraudulent marriage.

Houng McReynolds is charged with all five counts alleged in the indictment, including conspiracy to engage in forced labor; committing a forced labor violation; unlawful conduct involving documents in furtherance of forced labor; violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act; and conspiracy to commit marriage fraud. Joseph McReynolds faces three counts, including the two conspiracy counts and committing a forced labor violation. Vincent McReynolds is named in the two counts involving the forced labor violations and James McReynolds is charged with one count, conspiracy to commit marriage fraud.

Meanwhile, the U.S. District Court has issued a restraining order preventing the removal or sale of any assets from the I Do, I Do Wedding Shop and other property tied to the case until the resolution of the criminal forfeiture proceedings, which are included in the indictment. The United States Marshal will act as receiver for the property. The phone number for the wedding shop will remain operational, so customers with immediate questions can contact the store. The Marshals Service will also be reaching out to contact existing customers.

The maximum penalties for the charges contained in the indictment range from six months to 20 years in prison. Violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act is punishable by a jail term of up to six months. The counts related to the forced labor conspiracy, unlawful conduct involving documents and marriage fraud each carry a maximum penalty of five years. Finally, a conviction on the forced labor count could result in a prison term of up to 20 years.