



# NEWS RELEASE

## For Immediate Release

**MICHAEL A. RAMOS**  
District Attorney

Contact person: District Attorney Michael A. Ramos 909-382-3665  
Date: March 18, 2008

### **District Attorney Arrests 7 in Statewide Predatory Lending Scheme**

**San Bernardino, CA** – After a nine-month investigation, this morning search warrants were served by 33 members of the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office, 12 members of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, 4 members of the California State Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, and 12 members of the Los Angeles Police Department, at the following locations in the San Fernando Valley:

18817 Erwin Street, Tarzana, the residence of Eric Michael Pony, former president of LIFETIME FINANCIAL.

6316 Crebs Avenue, Tarzana, the residence of Paulette Pony, Eric Pony's sister and a former Notary Public who also served as a document signer for LIFETIME FINANCIAL.

18749 Margate Ave. #215, Encino, the residence of Jacob "Coby" Franco, former manager of telemarketers at LIFETIME FINANCIAL.

14290 Dickens Street #301, Sherman Oaks, the residence of Eli Hassine, a former Notary Public and document signer for LIFETIME FINANCIAL.

Arrest warrants have been issued in connection with this case for the following persons alleging felony violations of PC 182a Conspiracy, PC 487 Grand theft by false pretenses, PC 115a Recording false deeds, PC 470d Forgery, PC 532 Obtaining property by false pretenses, and PC 368 Elder abuse:

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Eric Michael Pony, 25, Tarzana         | Bail \$2,000,000.00 |
| Paulette Pony, 23, Tarzana             | Bail \$2,000,000.00 |
| *Jacob Shawn "Coby" Franco, 46, Encino | Bail \$2,000,000.00 |

(MORE)

|   |                     |
|---|---------------------|
| Eli Hassine, 25, Sherman Oaks             | Bail \$2,000,000.00 |
| *Carol Binnie Pencille, 57, Granada Hills | Bail \$2,000,000.00 |
| *Sibpun Ampornpet, 31, North Hollywood    | Bail \$2,000,000.00 |
| *Jason Imperial Burbidge, 35, West Hills  | Bail \$800,000.00   |

The scheme involved baiting homeowners with existing mortgages to refinance their homes through Lifetime Financial with a promise of unrealistically low mortgage payments and cash outs and then switching them to loans that did not match the promise. In most instances, the loan terms were changed without the homeowners' knowledge or permission by use of forged documents, crooked escrow agents and notaries who were all involved and profited from the scheme. In one instance, despite the homeowner's objections to the change in terms and specific instructions to cancel the application, the loan was funded. In other instances, the loan was promised to "reset" to a lower payment and never did. All paid excessively high loan fees.

Of the seven identified victims in San Bernardino County, two of the victims who are currently suffering the loss of their homes due to these fraudulent loans are aged 74 and 69, respectively. These two victims are elder adults as defined in PC 368. The total loss to the seven identified victims exceeds \$2,500,000.00. It is expected that additional victims of LIFETIME FINANCIAL may be identified as this investigation continues.

According to San Bernardino County District Attorney Michael A. Ramos, "These predatory lenders have taken advantage of people who placed their trust, as well as their homes, in the hands of these unscrupulous business people. We are pleased to be working with the State Attorney General's Office in putting these predators out of business and in jail where they belong."

In addition to the criminal charges being filed today in San Bernardino County, the attorney general's office seized all Lifetime Financial's assets and property and has obtained a court order to stop the company from operating. "As the mortgage crisis worsens, a growing number of fly-by-night companies are employing increasingly brazen tactics to push desperate homeowners into illegal and unconscionable loans," Attorney General Edmund G. Brown Jr. said. "The illegal sales practices of Lifetime Financial—run by Eric Pony and his mother and sister—included psychological pressure, forgery, and outright lies. Today's lawsuit marks an intensified crackdown on mortgage scam artists."

\*Currently in custody

###