



JUSTICE NEWS

THE BROOKLYN DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE NEWSLETTER

FALL 2015

Takedown of Major Heroin Ring and Other Drug Dealers



DA Thompson announces indictment of a major heroin distribution ring

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Brooklyn District Attorney Ken Thompson has made prosecuting drug dealers a high priority. Since the summer of 2014, the DA's Investigations Division and the specialized Violent Criminal Enterprises Bureau, in partnership with the NYPD, have executed numerous takedowns of drug traffickers in various Brooklyn neighborhoods.

Most recently, a Williamsburg-based heroin distribution ring was eliminated with the indictment of 25 defendants, including the central suspect's mother, sister and brother. The indictment charges that the drug operation included a court supervisor and an aspiring drug abuse counselor who allegedly sold heroin in Staten Island, which has a rapidly growing heroin problem.

"There is a growing heroin epidemic in New York and other parts of the country that's literally killing many of our young people," DA Thompson said in a September press conference, announcing the indictments, which were based on wiretaps and other surveillance that dismantled a ring that allegedly pumped some \$1.5 million worth

of heroin into city streets every year.

Other investigations targeting drug dealers, mostly in and around public housing developments, resulted in dozens of arrests and the recovery of narcotics and illegal guns. One of them has also led to a murder charge. Typically starting as a response to community complaints, these takedowns have come after months of undercover drug buys and surveillance.

In August, 15 defendants were charged after a takedown in Flatbush, among them, an 18-year-old defendant was implicated in an alleged shooting death a week earlier. Police, who made about 100 drug purchases over the course of the investigation, also recovered a 9mm Beretta pistol.

In July, four defendants were arrested in the Cooper Houses in Greenpoint, culminating a five-month investigation during which undercover officers made 58 buys. And earlier that month, 13 people were charged in a similar operation in and around the Bushwick and Borinquen Plaza Houses in

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A Message From Brooklyn DA Ken Thompson



It is my privilege to welcome you to the fall edition of the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office newsletter, *Justice News*. Here, you will find articles on some of my office's singular achievements and notable developments this past summer. From successful drug takedowns to a major conviction for gun trafficking to the prosecution of cases involving wage theft and immigrant fraud, my staff and I continue to make great strides in our effort to protect public safety and do justice in Brooklyn. In this vein, it is imperative that we do all we can to ensure that our criminal justice system is based on fundamental fairness. Unfortunately, thousands have been marching across the nation during this past year because they have lost confidence in our criminal justice system. They have lost confidence that there is one standard of justice for all, that everyone receives a fair trial and that those who are convicted are in fact guilty of the crimes with which they were charged. In line with our effort to restore this trust and confidence, we must address the issue of wrongful convictions – an injustice that no jurisdiction in America is immune from.

When I took office in January 2014, I inherited a staggering number of potential wrongful conviction claims. But despite this, only two prosecutors were assigned to what was then called the Conviction Integrity Unit and they were given very few resources to do their work. I immediately took steps to rectify this situation. I entirely revamped the unit and renamed it the Conviction Review Unit (CRU). I secured a budget of \$1.1 million and staffed the unit with 10 prosecutors, all with significant experience trying cases across the spectrum. The unit is led by Mark Hale, who had worked for 30 years as an Assistant District Attorney and handled over 200 homicide jury trials. I also brought in Ronald Sullivan, a Harvard Law School professor and Director of Harvard's Criminal Law Institute, to serve as my Special Counsel in charge of the unit. Professor Sullivan is a respected attorney, with years of experience as a public defender, who also served as an advisor to President Obama on criminal justice issues. We also established a mechanism of checks and balances by creating an Independent Review Panel, which consists of three outside and highly respected attorneys who, independent of the CRU's recommendations, also advise me before I make a decision on any case.

My CRU prosecutors go through old file cases, combing for evidence that may have been overlooked or not presented at trial, interviewing original witnesses if possible, and even traveling to other states when needed and revisiting crime scenes. So far, the CRU has reviewed some 46 cases. We are standing by the convictions obtained in the majority of them. However, we have concluded that in 14 instances men were wrongfully convicted right here in Brooklyn. I believe that prosecutions must be based on fairness, and not just on winning convictions. I also believe that every prosecutor's office should maintain a conviction review unit in some form.

For this reason, I am proud to be hosting a *Wrongful Conviction Summit* this October. There, district attorneys and their staff from throughout the nation will come together in Brooklyn to discuss conviction review and the process for establishing units in their own jurisdictions. As chief law enforcement officers, district attorneys must have the courage and the humility to correct mistakes and miscarriages of justice that have occurred. It is only with such efforts that we can begin to restore public confidence in our criminal justice system. Thank you once again for giving me and my staff this opportunity to serve you. I wish you and your family a happy and healthy fall season.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

18-Year Prison Sentence for Out-of-State Firearms Trafficker

Stopping the flow of illegal guns from out of state to Brooklyn – and securing lengthy prison sentences against gun traffickers who flood our streets with firearms – is one of DA Thompson's most important objectives. Towards that end, an important undercover investigation led to the conviction in August of a gun smuggler who sold over 150 guns to a police officer and was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

That firearms trafficker, Michael Quick, pleaded guilty to making 13 car trips from his home in Georgia to Canarsie, Brooklyn, up Interstate 95, known as "The Iron Pipeline." He then sold a total of 151 firearms, including assault rifles, to an undercover NYPD cop between September 2013 and April 2014. One shipment was made up of 25 guns, which was the largest single weapons buy in the history of the NYPD.



DA Thompson and Police Commissioner Bill Bratton showcase smuggled firearms (courtesy of Alec Tabak)

The deadly arms included an AR-15 assault rifle, MAC-11 subcompact machine pistol, two TEC-9 semiautomatic pistols and a variety of pistols and revolvers, many of which were loaded. The unlawful operation was highly lucrative: a gun bought in Georgia for \$200 could be sold in Brooklyn for \$1000.

"This harsh prison sentence reflects our determination to bring to justice out-of-state firearms traffickers who use lax gun laws down south to flood our city with guns," DA Thompson said after Quick was sent upstate. "We will continue to go after these merchants of death no matter where they live."

The 18-year sentence is lengthy for this type of crime and should serve as a signal to gun traffickers that they risk many years in prison when engaging in this dangerous and illicit trade.

Putting Away Those Who Commit Gun Violence

Gun violence that spreads mayhem in our communities and all too often leads to injuries or death of innocent bystanders, some of them children, will be vigorously prosecuted by DA Thompson and his office. The Violent Criminal Enterprise Bureau, Crime Strategies Unit, Homicide Bureau and Trial Zone Bureaus place an emphasis on such cases and obtain convictions and lengthy prison sentences against defendants who maim and kill.

In early June, Kane Cooper, 19, was sent to prison for 17 years after pleading guilty to shooting an 11-year-old girl while she sat in front of her Bedford-Stuyvesant home in May 2013, paralyzing her from the waist down. The defendant had opened fire at rival gang members who were hanging out more than a block away, and a bullet struck the young girl and lodged in her spine.

In July, we secured a conviction against the two men responsible for another tragic shooting in Brownsville in 2013 that claimed the life of a 16-month-old baby,

Antiq Hennis. Daquan Breland was convicted of the murder of little Antiq, who was shot in the head with a bullet meant for his father, while Daquan Wright was found guilty of handing the pistol to the gunman just before the fatal gunfire erupted.

Other instances of gun violence, mostly stemming from disputes between rival crews, have also been handled swiftly and with unwavering determination. Those include the indictment of four defendants for allegedly wounding five victims during an August shooting in Red Hook, including a pregnant woman who lost her unborn child. The DA's Office will continue to prosecute such cases with an eye toward maximum prison sentences to ensure that those responsible will be taken off the streets of Brooklyn for many years.



Guns recovered in a gang investigation

Protecting Seniors and Immigrants from Scams and Con Artists

The most vulnerable members of our society, including senior citizens and undocumented immigrants, are oftentimes the targets of scammers and con artists. The District Attorney's Frauds Bureau is paying attention and has brought several indictments against alleged fraudsters, sometimes using new or enhanced statutes to make sure justice is done.

In early September, an insurance agent was charged in a 64-count indictment for allegedly stealing a total of \$2.5 million from a dozen elderly clients by falsely promising to invest their life savings or by surrendering their insurance policies without their knowledge. The defendant is accused of preying on Italian immigrants, whose language he spoke and with whom he had years-long relationships. He was charged with grand larceny as a hate crime because he targeted the alleged victims because of their age.

"He held himself out as a savvy investor and trusted advisor, when in fact he was allegedly nothing more than a crook. These victims lost hundreds of thousands of dollars of their life savings at a time when they need it most," DA Thompson said.

Another alleged con man was indicted in June for allegedly posing as a lawyer and offering bogus immigration services for a fee. An undercover operation exposed the Sunset Park resident, who is accused of offering an investigator a Social Security card and Green Card while collecting payments without ever filing any paperwork with U.S. authorities.

The fake attorney even held his meetings in the library of the Brooklyn Bar Association to create a veneer of legitimacy. He was charged, among other counts, with immigrant



DA Thompson at an Immigration Forum

assistance services fraud – the first time the new statute was used anywhere in New York State.

To inform the public about the important work of the newly-created Immigrant Fraud Unit and to offer assistance, the DA's Office has been holding periodic Immigration Forums in community centers throughout Brooklyn where information is shared about fraud prevention and resources are offered regarding legal services. Part of the reason is to encourage immigrant victims - many of whom are hesitant about contacting the authorities - to come forward when victimized. Immigration Forums have been held in Crown Heights and Sunset Park so far.

Aggressively Prosecuting Wage Theft and Other Labor Crimes

Wage theft is a problem afflicting many workers who toil in low paying jobs. DA Thompson established a Labor Fraud Unit to hold accountable those who steal hard-earned wages and to make sure that victimized workers receive every penny they have earned and are not exposed to unsafe working conditions.

The Labor Fraud Unit has produced tangible results in June, when contractor William Dorvillier pleaded guilty to scamming 11 workers out of wages and agreed to return all the \$67,220 they were owed.

During a period that lasted over four years, the laborers worked on brownstones and small-house renovations across Brooklyn, but were often shortchanged and, by the end of 2014, were due between \$3,000 and \$9,000 each. Some of the victims, most of them undocumented immigrants, were interviewed by *El Diario* in an article

about the case and spoke of their initial fear of contacting the authorities. "When we sat to talk with the district attorney, they told us not to worry; that it would be different here," one of them recalled.

In another case, which was indicted in August, the owner of a cleaning company based in Bedford-Stuyvesant was charged with allegedly stealing from at least 10 workers a total that exceeded \$4,500. Some of the cleaners employed by the defendant allegedly worked many hours, but were not paid in full.

Media interviews with cleaning workers demonstrated that, just like in the case of undocumented construction workers, a large number of them were taken advantage of or were underpaid by their employers, showing that this issue is pervasive and law enforcement action is much needed.

Helping Thousands of New Yorkers Begin Again

There are over 1 million outstanding summons warrants in New York City, stemming from failure to answer a ticket for a low-level offense. Calling this backlog “a crisis,” DA Thompson, in partnership with the NYPD, the Legal Aid Society, the Office of Court Administration and the community, is doing something about it.

Summons warrants – ordered when people fail to answer a ticket for quality of life offenses such as riding a bike on the sidewalk, walking a dog without a leash or being in a park after closing – weigh down an overburdened court system and can hold back individuals who have them on their records. Moreover, people with an open warrant face the prospect of a sudden and unexpected arrest and may be put through the system and spend overnight or a weekend in jail until their case is called in court.

This is why DA Thompson established *Begin Again* – an initiative that brings the courtroom to the community and allows such warrants to be vacated in a cooperative, non-confrontational setting.



“The summons itself might have been for a minor offense, but the warrant can have – and may have already had – a major negative impact and can put our police officers at risk unnecessarily,” the District Attorney said when kicking off the program over Father’s Day Weekend in June.

Nearly 2,000 people from all over the city attended the first two *Begin Again* events – in June in Clinton Hill, and in September in East New York – and many warrants were cleared, allowing scores of New Yorkers to begin

again and move on with their lives with a peace of mind.

In July, DA Thompson called on Mayor Bill de Blasio to implement



DA Thompson announces the Begin Again initiative



Participants wait in line at the second Begin Again event (courtesy of SPCBC Griots Photography Ministry)

the successful *Begin Again* program citywide and Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez highlighted *Begin Again* when she wrote to U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch, asking the federal government to provide grants and to encourage other court systems around the country to undertake similar programs.

The unprecedented turnout for the first two events in Brooklyn, fueled in part by enthusiastic outreach effort from many criminal justice and community-based organizations, is a testament of the urgent need to address the staggering number of open warrants plaguing our court system. It also demonstrates the enormous benefits that can be achieved when law-enforcement agencies and the communities they serve come together.

Recent and Noteworthy Promotions

Among a number of promotions announced by DA Thompson recently were two outstanding and dedicated prosecutors who helped strengthen the Blue Trial Zone and Civil Rights Bureau.



ADA Frances Weiner

Frances Weiner was promoted to Bureau Chief of the Blue Trial Zone, which handles cases in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bay Ridge, East Flatbush and other neighborhoods. Prior to that, she was First Deputy Chief of the Violent Criminal Enterprises Bureau and First Deputy Bureau Chief of the Blue Trial Zone.

Ms. Weiner started her career in the DA’s Office in 1995 and served in a variety of bureaus, including Investigations and Domestic Violence. She prosecuted a wide array of cases, including assaults, home invasions and robberies, securing

lengthy sentences against offenders.



ADA Kelli Muse

Kelli Muse assumed the position of Deputy Chief of the Civil Rights Bureau, which handles cases against law enforcement officers and also includes the Hate Crimes Unit, which focuses on bias-motivated crimes committed because, or based on, a perception of the victims’ race, ethnicity, religion, age or sexual orientation.

Ms. Muse previously worked as a Nassau County prosecutor and also held positions in the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor, at a Trial Zone and in the Violent Criminal Enterprises Bureau, where she investigated and prosecuted gang and drug cases.

Tenth Anniversary of the Brooklyn Family Justice Center

DA Thompson, city officials, judges, staff of the Brooklyn DA’s Office, domestic violence victims and advocates all came together in September to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Brooklyn Family Justice Center (FJC), the first and largest in the city. FJC is a one-stop location for victims of domestic violence, elder abuse and sex trafficking who often require multiple services, including criminal justice, civil, financial and housing.

Established in 2005 and located on the 15th floor of the DA’s Office, the Brooklyn center has served over 170,000 clients in its 10 years of existence. Four city agencies, including the DA’s Office, and 19 community-based organizations provide services at the FJC. The center also includes a children’s room where kids can play while their families are being helped.



Any victim, regardless of whether they have a pending criminal case or not, can utilize the center’s services and staffers are fluent in multiple languages.

“I’d like to extend my sincerest congratulations and thanks to everyone who has worked to make the Brooklyn Family Justice Center a tremendous success,” DA Thompson said in commemorating the 10th anniversary of the FJC.

Also speaking at the September anniversary event was Angie, a client whose brave testimony helped secure a conviction and a prison sentence of 60 years to life against a man who abused her. She was helped on the stand by Paz, a comfort dog provided by the FJC who assisted her throughout the ordeal—and was present at the ceremony as she delivered remarks.

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East Williamsburg.

These types of investigations will continue under the leadership of DA Thompson to protect hard-working residents who may be subjected to violence and quality-of-life issues that are strongly associated with drugs and dealers. They also make certain that traffickers of illegal narcotics are brought to justice.

DA Thompson in the Community



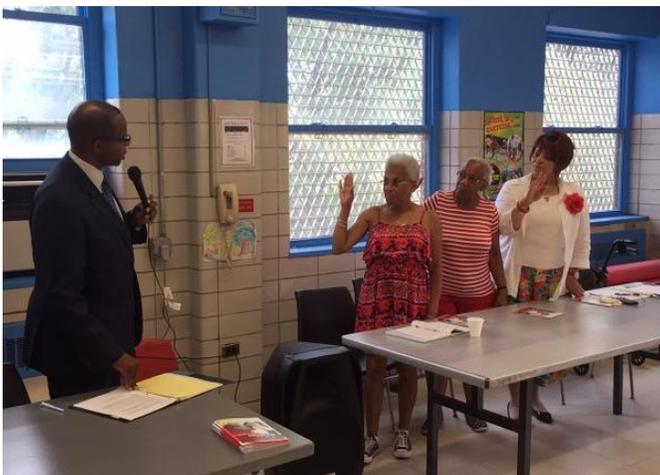
DA Thompson joined Spike Lee in Bedford-Stuyvesant for a great block party



At an Immigration Forum with Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and Council Member Carlos Menchaca



DA Thompson speaks to teens during National Night Out Against Crime



DA Thompson swears-in senior board members of the St. John's Recreation Center Senior Group



DA Thompson with revelers at the West Indian Day Parade

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

In Case of Emergency—Call 911

Main Number for NYC: 311 or (212) NEW-YORK

DA's Action Center Hotline: (718) 250-2340

Victim Services Unit: (718) 250-3820

Public Integrity Unit: (718) 250-2747

Domestic Violence Bureau: (718) 250-3300

Brooklyn Family Justice Center: (718) 250-5111

Elder Abuse Unit: (718) 250-3309

Immigrant Fraud Hotline: (718) 250-3333

Labor Fraud Unit Hotline: (718) 250-3770

Human Trafficking Bureau: (718) 250-2770

Teen Dating Violence: (718) 250-2463

Red Hook Community Justice Center: (718) 923-8200

KENNETH P. THOMPSON DISTRICT ATTORNEY



*"With an unwavering commitment to serve the people of Brooklyn
honorably and fairly and to ensure equal justice for all."*

Ken Thompson

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