

NEWS RELEASE



*Office of the United States Attorney
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**For Immediate Release
September 14, 2004**

BROUSSARD MAN SENTENCED TO FIVE YEARS IMPRISONMENT FOR PAWNING STOLEN FIREARM

Lafayette, Louisiana . . . MICHAEL J. BAPTISTE, age 42, from Broussard, Louisiana was ordered by United States District Judge Richard T. Haik to: (1) serve 63 months (5+ years) in federal prison; (2) pay a \$1,025.00 fine; and (3) pay \$100 restitution to a pawn shop for possession of a stolen firearm, announced United States Attorney Donald W. Washington. Upon completion of the 63-month prison sentence, BAPTISTE is to serve 36 months of “supervised release” and abide by certain conditions at the direction of the United States Probation Office. If BAPTISTE violates any conditions of his supervised release, then he may be required to serve an additional 36 months in federal prison. BAPTISTE pled guilty to possessing a stolen firearm in June 2004.

In August of 2003, BAPTISTE pledged a stolen firearm as security for a \$100 loan at a pawn shop in Lafayette, Louisiana. A Lafayette Police detective discovered the suspicious

transaction during a routine review of pawn shop records. The detective referred the investigation to federal officials in the Lafayette satellite office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). During the plea hearing in June 2004, BAPTISTE admitted to the Court that he knew the firearm, a Smith and Wesson .357 magnum revolver, had been stolen. Federal law prohibits anyone from possessing a stolen firearm or using a stolen firearm as security for a loan.

This case is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a nationwide program begun in 2001, and designed to reduce violence in our communities by aggressively using existing federal firearms laws. United States Attorneys, District Attorneys, Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and state officials have created partnerships to address crimes involving firearms. Generally, any arrest involving a firearm is reviewed immediately by local, state and federal authorities to decide whether the case is best suited for prosecution under state or federal law, or a combination of both. Project Safe Neighborhoods is expected to lead to longer prison terms for violent criminals, and a significant reduction in violent crime. To date, federal prosecutions under Project Safe Neighborhoods in the Western District of Louisiana have led to the incarceration of criminals responsible for violent crimes such as homicides, aggravated assaults, robbery, car jacking, burglary, and drug trafficking.

Sentencing in federal court is governed by the United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission. Under U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, actual sentences are based upon a formula that takes into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, and a defendant's criminal history, if

any. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This investigation was conducted by the Lafayette Police Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph T. Mickel.

For further information, please contact United States Attorney Donald W. Washington at 337-262-6618 or First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Flanagan at 318-676-3600.

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