



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Attention: Audio comments from U.S. Attorney Todd P. Graves are immediately available by request, or the MP3 file may be downloaded from the district's Web site at www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow.

ST. JOSEPH WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY, SENTENCED FOR DEFRAUDING RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS IN 9-1-1 SCHEME

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a St. Joseph woman pleaded guilty and was sentenced in federal court today for defrauding several disaster relief organizations working to assist victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York.

Cassaundra Estelle Montgomery, 42, of St. Joseph, was sentenced to 21 months in federal prison without parole after pleading guilty before U.S. District Judge Nanette K. Laughrey this morning to four counts of mail fraud. Graves noted that this was the harshest sentence available under the federal sentencing guidelines. The court also ordered Montgomery to pay a total of \$63,817 in restitution to the American Red Cross Liberty Fund (\$38,817), Safe Horizons' September 11 Fund (\$20,000), and the Robin Hood Relief Fund (\$5,000).

By pleading guilty, Graves said, **Montgomery** admitted that she used the mails to perpetrate a scheme to defraud charitable organizations providing financial assistance to victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

“Thousands of people lost their lives on September 11, 2001, when two planes hijacked by terrorists crashed into the World Trade Center towers in New York,” Graves said. “Tens of thousands more suffered severe physical, emotional and economic losses. As the rest of the nation mourned the devastating loss and as Americans rallied together to support those victims, **Montgomery** was plotting and scheming to illegally enrich herself. Her conduct not only desecrates the memory of the true victims of 9-11, but deprived others of needed assistance.

“Today, **Montgomery** is held accountable for taking selfish advantage of a national tragedy.”

Montgomery called the New York Police Department on September 25, 2001, Graves said, and filed a false missing person report for a brother, Jeffrey David Montgomery, who did not exist. **Montgomery** claimed that her brother had gone into the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001, to apply for a job at Cantor Fitzgerald, and was killed during the terrorist attacks. After filing that missing person report, contacting various charitable organizations, and submitting false documentation to them as proof of her brother’s existence and death, **Montgomery** received \$63,817 between October 23, 2001 and December 26, 2001.

Montgomery falsely claimed that she was financially dependent on her brother, Graves said. **Montgomery** received money from the charitable organizations to pay her personal expenses, he added, including rent, utility bills, credit card bills, medical expenses, a leased PT Cruiser automobile, and other bills and expenses.

Each of the four counts to which Montgomery pleaded guilty today charges a separate act of mail fraud, in which **Montgomery** caused checks made payable to herself to be issued by the charitable organizations and mailed to her St. Joseph address. Although not part of the charges to which Montgomery formally pleaded guilty, additional charges contained in the original 10-count indictment were considered by the court as relevant conduct for the purposes of sentencing and restitution.

As part of the scheme to defraud and to prove her brother’s existence, Graves explained, **Montgomery** sent the American Red Cross a false Missouri Department of Revenue, Division of Taxation and Collection, Employee’s Withholding Allowance Certificate, W-4 for Jeffrey D. Montgomery, bearing a fictitious Social Security account number, a fictitious Master Card statement for a joint account in her name and the name of her nonexistent brother, and a false “Application for Letters” filed in the Circuit Court of Buchanan County, Mo., for the estate of her nonexistent brother.

To document her relationship with her nonexistent brother and to show her financial dependence on him, Graves said, **Montgomery** created and sent the American Red Cross a false rental contract for an apartment that she purportedly shared with her brother, listing the tenant as Jeffrey D. Montgomery and bearing the false signature of her brother. **Montgomery** also created fictitious mail addressed to him at the apartment.

Montgomery sent the American Red Cross a signed affidavit for issuance of a death certificate for her nonexistent brother. In the affidavit, she falsely claimed, among other things, that she last heard from her brother at approximately 7:50 a.m. on September 11, 2001, when he called her stating that he was on an elevator at the World Trade Center. **Montgomery** requested \$2,000 from the American Red Cross to pay for a memorial service and \$3,427 to pay for a cement memorial for her nonexistent brother.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christina Y. Tabor. It was

investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow