

CITY OF CORAL GABLES

- MEMORANDUM -

TO: MAJOR RAUL PEDROSO
AWARDS SELECTION COMMITTEE

DATE: December 3, 2012

FROM: SERGEANT JOE WERNER *Joe Werner*
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS DIVISION

SUBJECT:
AWARD/HONOR NOMINATION

I nominate Detective Robert Wentzell for Officer of the Month, November 2012 reference CGPD case #s, 12-8285, 12-8079, 12-8310, 12-8699, and 12-8427.

The management at the Publix store at 2551 Lejeune Road advised Lt. Atherley, while he was working off-duty, of a group of individuals that appeared to have been feeding their ATM machines with cloned debit cards and stealing money from the accounts. Lt. Atherley alerted the officers on the midnight shift of two vehicles, a White Mercedes and a Silver Mitsubishi Eclipse, that were associated with this suspect criminal activity. Officer Valdivia, while conducting surveillance on the Publix, observed a Silver Mitsubishi Eclipse parked in front of the Publix ATM and followed it from Publix to a residence just off of SW16th Terrace and Lejeune Road. Officer Valdivia ran the tag information on the vehicle which came back to Jose E. Baez at 835 SW 12 Ct. in Miami. Officer Valdivia emailed this information to ECU.

I then pulled a series of recent cases involving ATM card fraud at Publix and assigned them to Detective Wentzell. Detective Wentzell began his investigation by organizing the information that he was provided, viewing the ATM video during the suspected dates and times, and contacting the victims. While working his assigned week as the afternoon shift detective, Detective Wentzell conducted surveillance for three days of the two residences that were identified from Officer Valdivia's surveillance. On Wednesday, November 28th, he observed an individual drive up to 4216 SW 16th Terrace in a White Acura. Detective Wentzell immediately recognized this individual as one of the suspects he had seen in the Publix ATM video which he reviewed for this case. The suspect entered the residence, then he exited twenty minutes later and got back in the Acura. Detective Wentzell proceeded to follow the Acura as it drove away. The driver of the Acura realized that he was being followed and made a sudden turn on to Lejeune Road almost causing an accident. Detective Wentzell requested patrol back-up and conducted a traffic stop of the Acura. During the stop Detective Wentzell confronted the suspect, identified as Ricardo Lazo, regarding his involvement in Detective Wentzell's ATM fraud investigation. The suspect told Detective Wentzell that he would tell him everything that he wanted to know. Detective Wentzell immediately had Lazo sign a written Miranda waver. Lazo then provided a full confession to Detective Wentzell which included the involvement of Lazo's accomplices, some of whom reside in California. Lazo informed Detective Wentzell that he had the equipment used to manufacture the cloned debit cards at his residence.

Detective Wentzell, Lazo, and CGPD crime scene then responded to Lazo's residence. Detective Wentzell had Lazo sign a written consent to search Lazo's residence. Detective Wentzell discovered and seized a credit card embossing machine, a credit card re-encoding machine, a high quality laser printer, four boxes of 500 blank credit card stock, the gold foil material utilized to make the holograms on most of today's credit cards, two computers, numerous cell phones, a satellite phone, hard drives, skimmers, and portable electronic storage devices, over 40 various gift cards, numerous Western Union receipts, bank receipts, two fraudulent Guatemalan Passports, two fraudulent US permanent resident cards, and one fraudulent California Driver's license. All documents had Mr. Lazo's face with different names on them. There was also a toll violation with a photograph of a Mercedes GLK 350 SUV white in color with the same tag number of APX-C55 that was registered to Mr. Baez. Lazo was arrested. ECU detectives then responded to 835 SW 12 Ct. in Miami to locate suspect a second suspect, Jose Baez. Baez was located and brought back to the station for questioning where he confessed to his involvement in the Publix ATM frauds. Baez was not arrested because video proof does not yet exist that he was involved in any of the Coral Gables cases.

This investigation is ongoing, in fact, as I write this memorandum Detective Wentzell has identified Lazo as being involved in another of our ATM cases. Detective Wentzell was persistent and thorough in conducting this investigation and the results speak for themselves. He showed his initiative by conducting the surveillance. He showed his experience in the way that his stop was conducted and written waivers were obtained prior to the interrogation/search. Lastly, he exhibits perseverance in that he is still doing paperwork associated with this case. Officer of the Month is about being at the right place, at the right time, and lastly, and most importantly, doing the right thing. Detective Wentzell has met all three criteria and I believe he deserves your consideration for this honor.

Reviewed by:


Lieutenant Jesse Medina
Criminal Investigations Division

12-5-12
Date


Major Teresa Silverio-Molina
Criminal Investigations Division

12/5/12
Date


Major Raul Pedroso
Award Selection Committee Chair

12/5/12
Date

JW/jw