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**5 ROCKFORD MEN FACE FEDERAL CHARGES FOR
SERIES OF ARMED ROBBERIES AT 8 ROCKFORD BUSINESSES**

ROCKFORD -- PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; ANDREW L. TRAVER, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; PHILLIP J. NICOLSI, Winnebago County State's Attorney; and CHET EPPERSON, Chief of the Rockford Police Department, today made the following announcement:

A federal grand jury has returned a fifteen count indictment charging five men in connection with a series of armed robberies at eight Rockford businesses between July 3, 2007 and August 2, 2007. The five men charged are **CHARLES O. EUBANKS**, 20; **MICHAEL JACKSON**, 21; **THOMAS L. HAWKINS**, 21; **MARTEL D. MULLINS**, 19; and **MARK O. COOPER**, 20. All five defendants are charged with conspiracy to commit a series of robberies which affected interstate commerce, and each defendant is also charged separately with individual robberies they are alleged to have committed. The robberies alleged in the indictment are as follows:

ROBBERY	DEFENDANTS
West State Food Mart 2907 West State Street July 3, 2007	MICHAEL JACKSON THOMAS L. HAWKINS MARTEL D. MULLINS
Chase 8 Auto Sales 1711 Broadway July 7, 2007	THOMAS L. HAWKINS
Soto's Jewelry 1126 South Main Street July 13, 2007	MICHAEL JACKSON

Checks for Cash 2949 11 th Street July 16, 2007	THOMAS L. HAWKINS
Victory Lane Auto Sales 2805 11 th Street July 20, 2007	CHARLES O. EUBANKS THOMAS L. HAWKINS
RB's Auto Sales 2701 11 th Street July 27, 2007	CHARLES O. EUBANKS
Englewood Beauty Supply 515 Marchesano Drive July 31, 2007	CHARLES O. EUBANKS MICHAEL JACKSON
Soto's Jewelry 1126 South Main Street August 2, 2007	CHARLES O. EUBANKS MICHAEL JACKSON MARK O. COOPER

Each man is also charged with using and carrying a firearm during a crime of violence. Eubanks faces four such counts, Jackson and Hawkins each face three such counts, and Mullins and Cooper are each charged with one such count. The charge of conspiracy to commit the robberies, as well as each robbery charge, carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment. In addition, each charge of using and carrying a firearm during a crime of violence carries a mandatory sentence of at least 5 years of imprisonment, and up to life imprisonment, which must be ordered to run consecutively to any other sentence imposed.

All five defendants are currently in state custody at the Winnebago County Jail, where they will remain pending their transfer to federal custody and arraignments in federal court next Monday, November 26 at 10:00 a.m.

First charged by the Winnebago County State's Attorney's Offices under state law, these defendants were transferred to federal court where they were charged under tough federal firearms laws as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an intensive, cooperative effort between local, state, and federal law enforcement to attack gun crimes. The cornerstone of the program is that every defendant charged in state court for an offense involving a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution in order to obtain the harshest penalties for the worst offenders. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov.

The case was investigated by Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and the Rockford Police Department. The case is being prosecuted in federal court by Assistant United States Attorney Michael F. Iasparro.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.