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## Authorities bust counterfeiting ring

Dozens of arrests follow Eaton County, Secret Service probe of bad checks

By Derek Wallbank  
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A counterfeiting ring that passed bad currency and checks from Delta

Township east to East Lansing and Meridian Township has been stopped, officials from the U.S. Secret Service and Eaton County Sheriff's Department said.

"They were ripping off the local area for hundreds of thousands of dollars," Eaton County Undersheriff Fred McPhail said Thursday.

"For the Lansing area, this was rather large," said Doug Lloyd, who heads up the economic crimes unit of the Eaton County prosecutor's office. "I would say it was unique in that all of the players were local."

Police said there have been dozens of arrests, with more likely to follow. Officials declined to release the names of those arrested, saying the investigation is ongoing.

Local retailers had reported people trying to cash fake payroll checks since at least late 2005.

Back then, police said they received two to three reports of bad checks a week, but had yet to establish that they were coming from the same source.

The checks were very sophisticated, Lloyd said. They were in the "hundreds of dollars" each, he said, but the amounts varied.

"They looked just like a payroll check you would receive," he said, and they included itemized tax deductions.

The Secret Service is leading the investigation. It teamed up with local authorities, including Eaton County sheriff's Detective Rick Buxton. When Buxton began combining bad check data into a spreadsheet, he noticed similar names popping up among the people trying to pass the checks.

And when one particular would-be thief became a little too brazen, police moved in.

The person, whose name was not released, attempted to buy car stereo equipment from a "big-box" store in Delta Township, police said. The suspect filled out forms proving ownership of the vehicle. That led police to a house in Lansing, where they found a computer with files detailing the operation, including check printing software and information on who was involved and how, police

### Secret Service commends 2 in Eaton Co. for roles in bust

During Wednesday's Eaton County Commission meeting, officials from the U.S. Secret Service awarded plaques to Eaton County Assistant Prosecutor Doug Lloyd and Eaton County Sheriff's Detective Rick Buxton, commending them on their roles in breaking up the counterfeiting ring at an Eaton County Commission meeting.

"They're true professionals," said Eaton County Undersheriff Fred McPhail. "People should be very proud."

said.

Lloyd said the organization had a corporate-like structure to it, though "there wasn't just one CEO."

But the case didn't stop there.

"Some of these people just blatantly continued to pass checks," Lloyd said.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Grand Rapids, which is prosecuting the case, would not comment on the precise number of arrests. Prosecutors also refused to release the names of those arrested.

"We don't discuss ongoing investigations, including whether or not we have one," said spokeswoman Kaye Hooker.

McPhail said small, family stores were particularly hard hit by the ring.

"It affected their operations, but also their ability to feed their families," he said.

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