

Texas Lottery Commission Press Release - June 28, 2002

Contact:

Leticia Vasquez, 512-344-5208

Lottery's Public Awareness Campaign Spurs Arrests In Latin Lotto Scam

(Austin, June 28) - Getting the word out on the Latin Lotto Scam has turned up the heat on the perpetrators of lottery-related fraud against the elderly, prompting arrests in Carrollton, San Antonio and Austin.

"We're beginning to see the results we were hoping for when we initiated this public awareness campaign about the Latin Lotto Scam," said Texas Lottery Commission Executive Director Linda Cloud. "The arrest and detention of various con artists in different areas of the state are clear indicators that continued public awareness about the scam will help minimize the number of victims and help law enforcement officers catch the culprits."

In the Carrollton case, which occurred in May, the victim was in the final stages of being conned, when he told his son that he was going to purchase a Lottery ticket that was a "sure-winner" from someone he met that afternoon.

"His son had read about our public awareness campaign in the Dallas Morning News and was able to prevent his father from becoming a victim," Cloud said. "In the nick of time they notified the Carrollton Police and four arrests were made after one of the suspects showed up at the elderly man's residence to collect \$5,000. The four suspects are reportedly from Latin America."

Two of the men were later released for lack of evidence, but two others, Fidelio Roley Zipagauta and Arturo Adolfo Mejia, have been charged with a second degree felony for certain transfers of claims, which is related to the sale of a chance to claim a prize. The suspects made bond and have a court date set for later this summer.

"That's part of the problem in cases such as these," Cloud said. "The suspects have a lot of ready cash precisely because they've been scamming victims out of money, so they can make bond and then disappear, court date or not. That's why it's imperative to catch them and make their bonds so high, they can't slip away."

In San Antonio, police arrested Clodoveo Martinez, also of Colombia, in April, after an attempt was made to sell a phony ticket to an elderly man for \$5,000.

An elderly victim was approached on the west side of San Antonio and was persuaded by the con artists to buy a lottery ticket they fraudulently claimed

to be a winner. While outside a credit union where he banked, the elderly victim had a last-minute change of heart and escaped with the money he had earlier given one of the perpetrators as part of the scam.

"The elderly gentleman managed to get help, and when the police arrived, he gave them a helpful description of the con artists and what kind of vehicle they were driving," Cloud said. "The sharp-eyed officer spotted the suspects' black SUV a few minutes later, stopped the car and arrested them on the spot."

Martinez was later transferred to Seguin, where he awaits deportation. He was charged with a misdemeanor.

In Austin, three suspects were apprehended during a routine surveillance by local police officers at a North Austin area shopping center parking lot.

The suspects remain in jail pending charges from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), but police officials say they have identified positively the detainees in other robbery cases. One suspect has an outstanding theft warrant from California, may be involved in a crime that occurred in Arizona and is implicated in three theft cases in Houston.

The Texas Lottery Commission initiated this public awareness campaign in mid-March, holding news conferences in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Lubbock where cases have been reported.

Lottery personnel have also visited a dozen community and adult nutrition centers in the same cities to warn the elderly of the perils of the scam.

In the days following each news event, an average of four-to-five elderly citizens have come forward to let police know that they were victims of the fraud.

Lottery personnel also have conducted law enforcement seminars in Dallas, San Antonio, Houston and El Paso to inform area law enforcement officials about lottery-related fraud against the elderly and how best to deal with suspects and what charges to file against them.

Since the Latin Lotto Scam is not confined to Texas, the Texas Lottery Commission has made available all its bilingual informational materials -- news releases, public service announcements and flyers -- to lotteries across the country for their use.

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The Texas Lottery, the 4th largest selling lottery in North America, is "Focusing on the Future of Education, One Ticket At A Time." By providing the 'Games of Texas' for more than 10 years, the Texas Lottery Commission (TLC) has generated more than \$10 billion for the state and paid nearly \$17 billion to players in prizes. For more information about the TLC, please visit the official website at <http://www.txlottery.org>