

U.S. Bank Clerk, Edwardsville Police, Secret Service, Help Crack Large Federal Fraud Case, Guilty Pleas Entered

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EAST ST. LOUIS - Two men entered guilty pleas this week to multiple federal charges, including conspiracy to commit bank fraud, bank fraud, and aggravated identity theft. An alert U.S. Bank clerk in Edwardsville helped crack the case with the assistance of Edwardsville Police and U.S. Secret Service when Elvin Lugo-Cales, Orlando, Fla., and Johnny Collado, 30, of Bronx, New York, attempted to commit a crime at the U.S. Bank in Edwardsville.

The investigation was conducted by the Edwardsville Police Department and United States Secret Service. The case came to local proximity in Edwardsville on March 5, 2020.

The U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois issued the following summary of the case from court documents: "Collado waited in the car while Lugo-Cales went into the bank. Inside, Lugo-Cales presented a fake United States passport bearing his photograph but someone else's name and tried to cash a counterfeit check in the amount of \$3,650 made payable to that other person. Fortunately, the bank teller recognized the check was counterfeit, refused to conduct the transaction, and called the police. Lugo-Cales left the bank and drove away with Collado, leaving the counterfeit check and false passport with his picture on it with the teller. The two men were stopped by police and taken into custody a short time later."

Edwardsville Police Chief Jay Keeven provided significant praise to the U.S. Bank clerk for her efforts in the case.

"We solve crimes by being there quickly," he said. "I know she (the bank clerk) may feel she played a small role in the suspects being apprehended so quickly, but she played a huge role. They would have not been caught at that time without her cooperation. We don't solve crimes on our own. People often say they didn't call because they didn't think it was a big deal when they see things happen. I always tell them, contact us, bother us, we are here 24-7 and that is why we are here. We work for the public."

On March 2, 2020, Lugo-Cales and Collado traveled from New York to St. Louis for the sole purpose of defrauding banks in the St. Louis Metro region. On March 5, they drove to a U.S. Bank location in Edwardsville. At the time of his arrest, Collado possessed and attempted to conceal numerous items used to perpetrate the fraud scheme, including over \$20,000 cash, numerous blank counterfeit checks, a counterfeit Oregon driver's license, and a false United States passport card.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Luke J. Weissler. Lugo-Cales and Collado face up to 30 years in prison and a fine of up to \$1,000,000 on each of their fraud charges. Their aggravated identity theft charges carry a mandatory sentence of two years of imprisonment, which must run consecutively to any other sentence imposed.

Sentencing hearings for the two men will be held at 10 a.m. on April 27, 2021 and 1:30 p.m. that day at the federal courthouse in Benton.