

United States Attorney's Office

Northern District of Iowa



United States Attorney Kevin W. Techau

PRESS RELEASE

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For further information contact:

Steve.Young@usdoj.gov

(319) 363-6333

Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Cedar Rapids Woman Sentenced to Federal Prison for Defrauding Elderly Couple Out of More than \$100,000

A woman who defrauded an elderly couple out of more than \$100,000 was sentenced yesterday to nearly three years in federal prison.

Tea Lynette Ware, 37, from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, received the prison term after a June 9, 2016 guilty plea to two counts of mail fraud and one count of using a fictitious name in mail fraud.

At the plea hearing, and in a plea agreement, Ware admitted that from about September 2015 through February 2016, Ware participated in a scheme to defraud an elderly Illinois woman during which the victim was falsely told she had won a lottery and was entitled to large sums of money. The victim was also told the winnings or funds could be claimed only if she first mailed Ware money for purported taxes or fees. In truth, no such winnings existed and the calls were designed only to steal from the victim and her husband, a resident of a long-term care facility with dementia. Like many senior citizens in the United States, the couple received unsolicited telephone calls; they even changed their telephone number to avoid unsolicited calls, but such calls nonetheless resumed after they changed their phone number.

At sentencing, United States District Court Chief Judge Linda R. Reade called Ware's behavior "despicable", noting that she had preyed on her victims, who were vulnerable not only because they were elderly but also due to their mental health conditions. Further, the judge found Ware caused her victims a substantial financial hardship, as she "picked" her victims "clean." The judge noted that, due to age and infirmity, the victims' earning years were over, and their life savings were now depleted.

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Ware was sentenced in Cedar Rapids to 33 months' imprisonment. A special assessment of \$300 was imposed, and she was ordered to make \$108,100 in restitution to her victims. Further, Ware forfeited \$40,000 that the government seized prior to Ware's Indictment. Ware must also serve a three-year term of supervised release after the prison term. There is no parole in the federal system.

"Whether abuse occurs in nursing homes or involves financial fraud schemes such as the one in which Ms. Ware participated, this office and the Elder Justice Task Force are committed to pursuing justice for the elderly," said United States Attorney Kevin Techau. "We will continue to work with our partners to hold accountable those who seek to financially exploit the most vulnerable in our society. I wish to thank the Postal Inspection Service and the FBI for their hard work investigating this case."

"The US Postal Inspection Service is committed to ensuring that these types of predatory schemes are investigated aggressively," said U.S. Postal Inspector in Charge Craig Goldberg of the Denver Division, which covers multiple states including Iowa. "It is imperative that we continue to work with our partners to protect those vulnerable individuals in our society who unknowingly fall prey to these schemes. We cannot allow fraudsters to utilize the U.S. mail to further their schemes."

In June, the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Iowa was selected as one of 10 districts in the nation to form an Elder Justice Task Force (<http://go.usa.gov/cSngj>). The task force was assembled to foster a collaborative working relationship among all levels of government officials, advocacy groups for the elderly and the disabled, and others charged with the care and protection for these vulnerable groups. The goals include ensuring the integrity of all government expenditures by eliminating fraud, waste, and abuse in health programs, and protecting some of the state's most vulnerable citizens from harm, whether it occurs in nursing homes or other institutions or involves financial fraud schemes. To learn more about the Department of Justice's Elder Justice Initiative, visit: <https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice/>

Ware was released on the bond previously set and is to surrender to the United States Marshal in Cedar Rapids on November 14, 2016. Thereafter she will be transferred to federal prison.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Tim Vavricek and was investigated by the United States Postal Inspection Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Court file information at <https://ecf.iand.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/login.pl>.
The case file number is 16-CR-27-LRR.

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