

Family charged in alleged gift card fraud

By Brock Weir

An Aurora family has been charged with fraud after a \$750,000 gift card fraud investigation led to their doorstep.

Charged with fraud over \$5,000, fraud under \$5,000, possession of property obtained by crime, use of credit card data, and possession of credit card data, are Zeba Chaudhry, 49, and Hasan Chaudhry, 21, both of Aurora, and Waleed Chaudhry, 24, of Pickering.

York Regional Police said investigations began in June after "several complaints" were received from loss prevention officers in various high traffic retail stores in the Greater Toronto Area. They reported three individuals purchasing merchandise using "fraudulently obtained gift cards."

"The way the scheme operated was that the accused used fraudulent credit cards to purchase gift cards at major retailers across the GTA," said Constable Andy Pattenden in a statement. "The gift cards would then be used to purchase high-value merchandise. The accused also exchanged some of the items purchased for merchandise of a lesser value and accepted the price difference back in cash. It is alleged the merchandise purchased was then inventoried at a residence in Aurora and sold online."

After a search warrant was issued, Constable Pattenden said a residence in Aurora was targeted where police "seized a large amount of merchandise that was believed to have been obtained by fraudulent means."

"Police also seized jewellery, a quantity of cash, and equipment used to manufacture fraudulent identification. At this time, the value of the fraud is approximately \$750,000 but the investigation is still ongoing."

Speaking to The Auroran, Pattenden said loss prevention officers "saw a connection" between a group of people "routinely using" fraudulent cards and there too was a trend with the stores being hit.

"It was basically all of the major retailers that would have some of the high ticket items such as televisions, furniture, mattresses, bed frames and "barbeques," he said. "A lot of the retailers have their own divisions of loss prevention who are highly trained in detecting these things. With the smaller retailers [we encourage people to report] any sort of suspicious activity."

"If people are making repeat purchases using things like gift cards, take note of it. If they feel some of the activity is suspicious, contact police. In this case here, they were buying items and selling them online. There is a component there of be a little cautious of what you might be purchasing online."

"If something looks too good to be true, then it probably is."

Charges have not been proven in court. They are expected to appear in court on October 10.

Anyone with information is encouraged to contact the York Regional Police Major Fraud Squad Unit at 1-866-876-5423 x6612, Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS, or leave an anonymous tip online at www.1800222tips.com.