



A Carthage man was assessed a suspended sentence and probation Monday on a conviction for setting up fraudulent DirecTV accounts using the names and Social Security numbers of Butterball Turkey Co. employees. At a hearing in Jasper County Circuit Court in Joplin, Circuit Judge Gayle Crane sentenced Jose N. Velasquez, 37, to two years in prison for identity theft but suspended execution of the sentence and placed him on supervised probation for five years. Velasquez pleaded guilty to the charge on March 24 in a plea agreement with the county prosecutor's office that limited any prison time he might be required to serve to no more than two years.

The defendant was a former installer for DirecTV who had not worked for the company for more than six months when a Carthage police investigation linked him to a number of phony accounts set up with the satellite-television service. Police began receiving complaints in August 2006 from about 20 people whose names had been turned over to a collection agency for collection of delinquent payments to DirecTV for service they never sought or received. Police said the accounts included their names and Social Security numbers but had phony addresses.

All of the victims were current or former employees of the turkey-processing plant in Carthage, according to court records. DirecTV assisted police in determining that the accounts had been set up with an installer using a telephone number that proved to be the defendant's phone number.

Identity theft is a Class C felony in Missouri carrying up to seven years in prison. Police and court records do not indicate who actually received the satellite-television service listed under the victims' names. But the judge ordered that the defendant pay restitution in the case once a total dollar amount of the fraud has been determined and reported to the court by the local probation and parole office.