The Virgin Islands Consortium

Woman Admits to Stealing Credit Card Information of Hotel Gift Store Guests to Make Several Online Purchases

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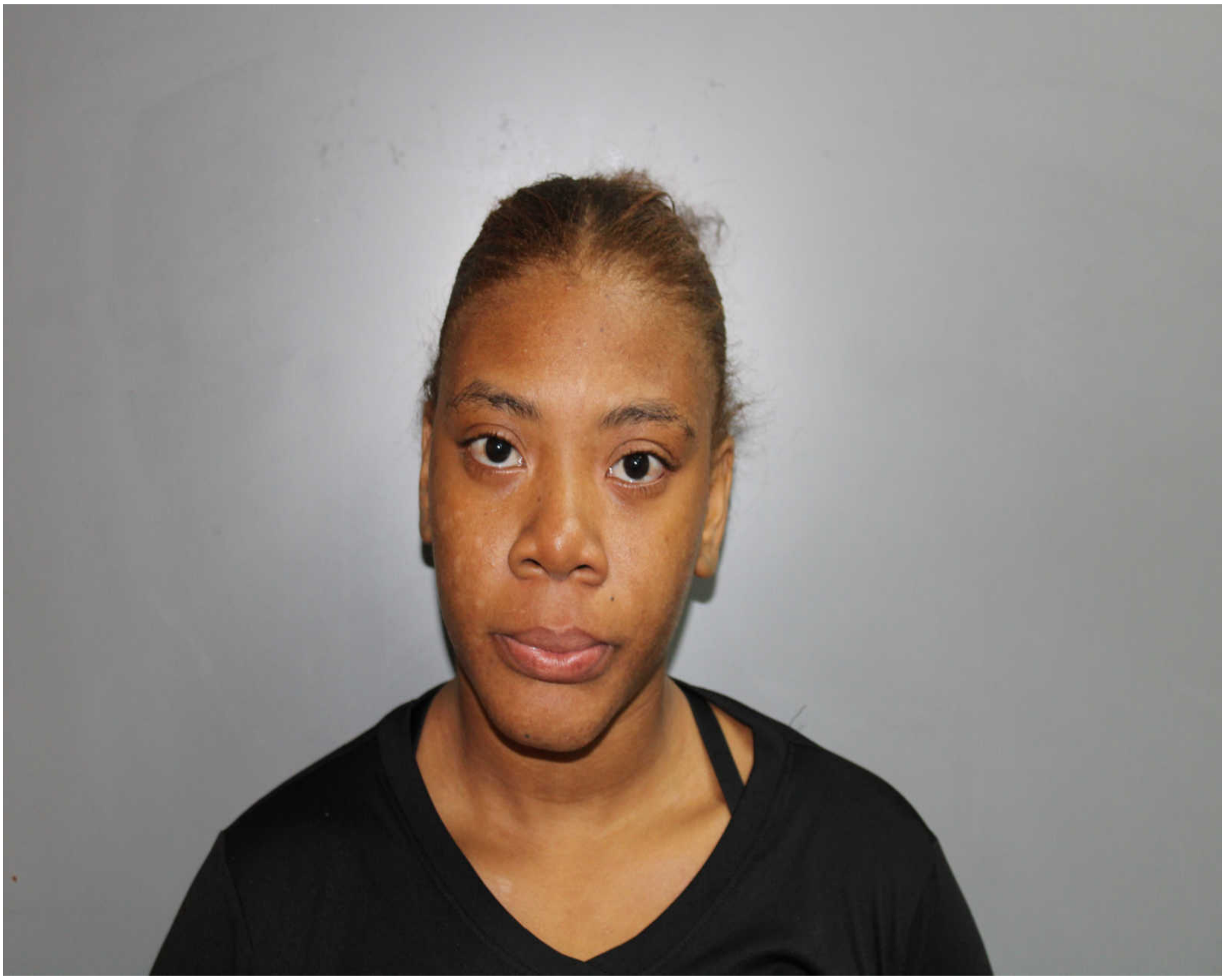

Mugshot of Leah Benjamin. **By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT**

ST. CROIX — An employee of a hotel gift store in St. Thomas has been arrested for making purchases using stolen credit card information from several customers.

According to a probable cause fact sheet before the court, on March 8th a police officer contacted the Economic Crimes Unit regarding a report from jewelry store Crucian Gold that purchases were made with stolen credit cards. The unit initiated an investigation into the complaint based on interviews conducted and documents received. They discovered that the jewelry store had become aware of numerous fraudulent online orders. However, according to the business, only two of the orders totaling $275 were fulfilled. Those orders were picked up by a Leah Benjamin on February 16th.

The manager of the store explained that the business pays for an online fraud protection service from a credit card company which reimbursed them for the $275 in fraudulent purchases. The company also alerted the jewelry store to nine other suspicious orders totaling $2,062. These other orders each had either the same address, phone number or customer profile as the two orders which were initially reported as fraudulent. All nine orders were subsequently canceled.

The store manager then made contact with one of the owners of the stolen credit cards. The individual reportedly told the manager that the charges totaling $205 made on March 1st were fraudulent and that their cards may have been compromised at a hotel on St. Thomas.

The Crucian Gold manager explained that when orders are made, the store texts an invoice code to the customer which is used at collection. Identification cards are only required when the invoice code is not available. On March 8th the manager received a call regarding two orders placed on March 5th totaling $420. The manager informed the unknown female that an identification card and the credit card of the person on file would need to be presented upon collection. The manager later called the number in the presence of police, but the unknown female hung up and did not answer a second call from the manager.

Police investigations led them to the individual in whose name the phone number was registered. The individual appeared to have multiple addresses in St. Croix including one which matched the address used on the purchases at the jewelry store. Leah Benjamin was identified as an associate of that individual. Police made contact with Benjamin on March 9th and she agreed to answer questions pertaining to the investigations.

She was later shown eleven purchase orders from the jewelry store totaling $2,337 and asked if she ordered the items. According to the fact sheet, after providing various inconsistent statements, Benjamin eventually admitted to creating fraudulent accounts and placing the eleven orders using stolen credit card numbers. She stated that she had collected two of the orders totaling $275 on February 16th. Benjamin also admitted to using the stolen card information to order clothing and baby items from multiple online stores. However, she claimed that all of the orders were canceled.

She further admitted to writing down the card information from several unknown customers at the hotel gift store where she was employed. When police contacted the hotel gift shop, the manager indicated that Benjamin had texted her on March 7th indicating that she could no longer work there and that her mother had bought her a ticket back to St. Croix. According to police, the manager indicated that she was not aware of the stolen card information and that she would review the surveillance system for the dates requested by the police.

Leah Benjamin was subsequently charged with obtaining money by false pretenses, grand larceny and access to a computer for fraudulent purposes. Her bail was initially set at $20,000. She appeared for an advisement hearing on Friday where a judge ruled that she would be allowed to post $500 in cash and sign an unsecured bond for the remainder of the bail amount. The defendant has also been ordered to surrender her travel documents to the court for the pendency of this matter. Benjamin, who is currently unemployed has been ordered to conduct a work search and provide proof of this search and the results to the probation office. This will involve her contacting at least two employers a week.