

MOUNT HOLLY - Three men were arrested in a money-laundering operation that netted nearly a half-million dollars in cash, nine vehicles, three motorcycles and 30 high-end watches, authorities announced Monday.

The investigation began in November, when Cinnaminson police became suspicious of a check-cashing business on Route 130, MAIA Consulting. After executing a search warrant for the business, a storage unit and the homes of three alleged co-conspirators, investigators said construction companies all over the East Coast were using MAIA to hide payments to undocumented workers.

As they dug deeper, authorities found financial records and bank accounts going back to 2015. These records showed several people used the Cinnaminson business to launder as much as \$100 million in what they called "an elaborate, illegal check cashing scheme."

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The Burlington County Prosecutor's Office said MAIA was used to issue checks to "shell" companies that shield subcontractors who employed undocumented workers from labor regulations, tax obligations and insurance requirements. MAIA then received a percentage of the checks that were cashed, the prosecutor's office said.



Wesley Dos Santos is charged in a money laundering scheme. (Photo: Burlington County Prosecutor's Office)

MAIA's owner, Renato Maia Da Silva, created and managed his own shell company along with co-conspirators, enabling them to profit further from the scheme, according to the prosecutor's office.

Money allegedly was deposited and withdrawn from shell accounts in order to conceal recipients' identities.

Authorities seized \$450,000 cash, nine vehicles including a fully restored 1967 Pontiac Tempest GTO, three motorcycles and 30 high-end watches.



Lucas Alves is charged in a money laundering scheme. (Photo: Burlington County Prosecutor's Office)

“This is not a victimless crime,” Prosecutor Scott Coffina said in a news release. “These illegal financial transactions have increased the costs of construction in our area, deprived multiple government bodies of needed tax revenue, and placed some of our most vulnerable construction workers at peril from injuries that occur on the job.”

Da Silva, 51, a Cinnaminston resident, is charged with money laundering. Wesley Dos Santos, 33, of Palmyra, and Lucas Alves, 34, of Cinnaminson, face the same charge in connection with the scheme. All three Brazilian nationals are in the United States illegally, the prosecutor's office said.

The investigation continues, the prosecutor's office said, as construction companies, general contractors and subcontractors are scrutinized. The agency said it anticipates more arrests.

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(Photo: Burlington County Prosecutor's Office)