

## Leading white supremacist, 4 others charged in Midwest bank robberies

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PHILADELPHIA (AP) \_ One of the nation's leading white supremacists and four others were indicted Thursday on charges of conspiring to rob seven banks in the Midwest to bankroll their movement.

Mark Thomas, leader of the Aryan Nations in Pennsylvania and a minister in the white supremacist Christian Identity Movement, recruited gang members at his home in Macungie, a small town near Allentown, the indictment said.

Three others named Thursday were charged last year with robbing 22 banks of \$250,000 over two years as members of the self-proclaimed "Mid-Western Bank Bandits," also known as the Aryan Republican Army.

The gang's alleged ringleader, Peter Langan, 38, is standing trial in Columbus, Ohio.

The name of the fifth suspect, Michael W. Brescia, 24, has surfaced during the investigation into the Oklahoma City bombing. He once lived with a German citizen whom Timothy McVeigh tried to call 12 days before the terrorist attack.

U.S. Attorney Michael R. Stiles said Thursday's bank robbery conspiracy indictment was not connected to the Oklahoma investigation.

Stiles said the five suspects split the proceeds from the seven robberies among themselves and contributed a share to Thomas for their self-styled organization. Authorities said Thomas did not participate in the robberies.

The five face up to five years in prison if convicted. Thomas also faces an additional 20 years if convicted of two charges of receiving money stolen from banks.

Thomas, 44, surrendered to the FBI in Allentown, while Brescia was arrested outside his house in Philadelphia as he was leaving for work.

The indictment charges that Thomas, Brescia, Langan, Kevin W. McCarthy and Scott William Stedeford, 27, conspired to rob seven banks in Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin and Iowa from October 1994 to December 1995.

In November, Stedeford was convicted of bank robbery in Iowa and faces a 30-year term. McCarthy is cooperating with authorities and is expected to plead guilty to six robberies next month.

In testifying against Langan on Thursday, McCarthy said Thomas introduced him to Langan at a waffle house in Arkansas in 1994. "We believed the government was corrupt and that it was evil," he told the jury.

Thomas, a Philadelphia native, is also head of Christian Posse Comitatus, a branch of Christian Identity, which espouses that Northern European whites are the chosen people, Jews are the "synagogue of Satan," people of color are inferior "mud races," and homosexuals should be executed.

In the 1980s, Thomas was a spokesman for the Ku Klux Klan in Allentown, then switched to the Aryan Nations in the early 1990s.

Federal authorities said Thomas' specialty is recruiting young supremacists. In the last several years, he has been a ``gadfly for young people," said Barry Morrison, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League in Pennsylvania.

``He has had a string of young people visit and stay at his home where they have been exposed to hate doctrine," Morrison said Thursday.

In his Internet newsletter, The Watchman, Thomas last summer said he answered a reporter who asked him what he thought about the Midwest bank robberies by saying: ``How many hundred thousand times in any given day that banks robbed people?"

In an interview last summer, Thomas said he acted like a father figure to McCarthy, taking him into his home and then to Elohim City, a white separatist religious community in far eastern Oklahoma.

Morrison said Thomas also took Brescia to Elohim City, where Brescia met Andreas Strassmeir.

McVeigh reportedly tried to call Strassmeir twice in the weeks before the Oklahoma bombing. Residents of Elohim City have said McVeigh's call never reached Strassmeir.

Strassmeir, who has returned to Germany, has said he met McVeigh briefly in 1993 at a Tulsa, Okla., gun show but has not spoken with him since.

The fourth man charged with being part of the Mid-Western Bank Bandits, Richard Lee Guthrie Jr., committed suicide last summer after pleading guilty to 19 robberies.