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Pennsylvania white supremacist charged in bank robbery scheme

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PHILADELPHIA — The leader of the Aryan Nations in Pennsylvania recruited two men and influenced a third involved in a string of bank robberies by supremacists in the Midwest, federal authorities say.

An indictment handed down Thursday provided another piece in a puzzle that began coming together more than six months ago when federal authorities charged four men with belonging to the Aryan Republican Army, a group accused of stealing \$250,000 from 22 banks in two years.

Three of those four were charged Thursday with conspiracy, accused of plotting seven of the robberies with Mark Thomas to use the money for white

supremacist causes.

As the fifth robber, the indictment identifies Michael W. Brescia, who has been vaguely linked to a person once cited in the Oklahoma City bombing case, but charges him only with conspiracy.

Thomas, a minister in the white supremacist Christian Identity Movement, recruited members of the gang at his home in Macungie, a small town near Allentown, the indictment says.

The gang members split the proceeds from the seven robberies among themselves and contributed a share to Thomas for their self-styled organization, according to U.S. Attorney Michael R. Stiles.

The five face a federal sentence of up to five years on the conspiracy charge. Thomas also faces an additional 20 years

on two charges of receiving money stolen from banks.

Brescia's name has arisen in the Oklahoma City investigation.

Brescia lived at Elohim City, Okla., in 1994 and 1995 with Andreas Strassmeir, a German national whom Timothy McVeigh attempted to call 12 days before, police say, McVeigh bombed the Alfred P. Murrah Building in April 1995.

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. Residents of Elohim City have said McVeigh's call never reached Strassmeir.

Stiles said Brescia was arrested without incident outside his house in Philadelphia as he was leaving for work. He would not

say where Brescia had been employed and insisted the indictment was not connected with the Oklahoma City bombing case.

Thomas surrendered at the FBI office in Allentown.

The indictment charges that Thomas and Brescia conspired with Peter K. Langan and Scott William Stedeford, both of Ardmore, Pa., and with Kevin W. McCarthy of Philadelphia from Oct. 25, 1994, to Dec. 19, 1995.

Thomas, active nationally in the white supremacist movement, has acknowledged knowing McCarthy and Stedeford.

In an interview last summer, Thomas said he acted like a father figure to McCarthy, 19, taking him into his home and then to Elohim City.

Barry Morrison, regional director of the

Anti-Defamation League in Pennsylvania, said Thomas filled the same role with Brescia, also taking him to Elohim City.

Federal authorities said Thomas' specialty was recruiting young supremacists. Throughout the 1990s, Thomas has been a "gadfly for young people," Morrison said.

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

Langan is on trial now in Columbus, Ohio, accused of leading the gang. Stedeford faces a 30-year sentence on a bank robbery conviction in Iowa. McCarthy, who has cooperated with authorities extensively, is expected to plead guilty to six robberies next month.