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PRESS RELEASE

Vinton, VA - James Travis Houston has been arrested in connection to a burglary at the Southern States Cooperative in The Town of Vinton. During the overnight hours of May 15, 2016, it was found that the maintenance building at The Southern States on Walnut Avenue had been broken into and \$7,000 to \$8,000 worth of equipment had been stolen. Detectives with The Vinton Police Department advised that it appeared that the suspect may have been familiar with the layout of the building.

A few days after the larceny from Southern States, James Houston was found to have pawned several of the items stolen from the burglary at area pawn shops. It was also found that Robert James Lewis had also pawned several items from the burglary at a pawn shop on Williamson Road in Roanoke County. Both James Houston and Robert Lewis have been charged with felony obtaining money by false pretense charges. Information from Southern States found that James Houston had previously worked for Southern States.

During the course of the investigation, information received from The Roanoke City Jail and The Roanoke County Jail provided enough information for James Houston to be charged with the burglary of the Southern States Maintenance Building. Rachel Mountcastle was also charged with felony possession of stolen property after a search warrant was executed on her Jeep. Detective C.J. Froeschl with The Vinton Police Department advised that over \$1,000 worth of equipment belonging to Southern States was located in Rachel Mountcastle's vehicle.

After warrants were issued for Robert Lewis, he was found to have left Virginia and is believed to be in Pennsylvania. Warrants remain on file for his arrest. The arrests of the other suspects occurred in July of this year. Detective Froeschl advised that overall, several thousand dollars worth of tools and equipment had been recovered and returned to Southern States. The Maintenance Department with Southern States had to shut down operations until replacement equipment could be purchased to continue operations.

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