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DAILY NEWS

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DA: Fakers clothes-d down

By KATHLEEN SAMPEY

Special to The News

Send in the clones.

That's what a Woodside garment counterfeiter had allegedly done when cops busted his \$60 million a year operation and seized more than 10,000 phony designer sweat-shirts and T-shirts, Queens District Attorney Richard Brown said yesterday.

The designer fakes have been sold since 1990 to knowing vendors and unsuspecting consumers all along the East Coast, he said.

Cops also seized state-of-the-art silk-screening and computer equipment used to produce the clothing and thousands of counterfeit name-brand labels, including Tommy Hilfinger, Polo by Ralph Lauren and Guess, officials said.

Tok H. Kang, 53, the owner of the alleged operation, and three others were arrested Friday afternoon at Korman Sportswear Inc.'s factory warehouse at 43-32 55th St. in Woodside.

Bugs and Barney

Brown called the business "the largest, most sophisticated counterfeit clothing manufacturing operation that has been seen here in the New York metropolitan area and perhaps nationwide."

10,000 shirts seized

Brown said the firm was able to produce items on a large scale and at manufacturing speed — 24 embroidered sweatshirts every three minutes and 80 silk-screened T-shirts per hour.

The clothing bore copied logos of professional and college sports teams, including the Georgetown Hoyas, the Knicks and the Yankees, as well as the likenesses of Bugs Bunny, Barney the dinosaur, and Beavis and Butt-head, officials said.

Vendors then sold the items out of the backs of vans, at flea markets, on the street, and at some shops along Canal St. to customers who thought they were getting a deal on the real thing, according to Brown.

An original Ralph Lauren sweatshirt costs about \$90, while the phonies were being sold for as low as \$16 to \$40, said Lee Sporn, chairman of the International Anticounterfeiting Coalition Inc.

Brown estimated the loss of state sales tax revenue on the items to be at least \$5 million a year. City authorities, acting on a tip from the Suffolk County district attorney's office, investigated the case for three months before raiding the warehouse, Brown said.

He added that Korman Sportswear produced only counterfeit items.

Feel the difference

Holding an authentic Lauren sweatshirt in one hand, and a fake in the other, Brown explained that consumers can detect counterfeit clothing by feeling the difference in the quality of the materials. Authentic items are 100% cotton while the fakes are usually a 50/50 cotton-polyester blend.

He also advised buyers to inspect underneath designer tags because counterfeiters often do not thoroughly remove the original labels.

If convicted of the felony and misdemeanor charges of trademark counterfeiting and criminal possession of a forged instrument, Kang, of 39-60 45th St., Woodside, faces a maximum of 15 years in prison, Brown said.

Also arrested Friday were Michael Park, 26, of Toronto; Giovanni Flores, 34, of 29th St., Astoria; and Michael Charara, 27, of Main Ave., Clifton, N.J.



QUEENS DA Richard Brown yesterday shows off T-shirts from Woodside factory that was allegedly producing phony designer duds.
JOE DEMARNA