

# Ringleader confesses

Wolcott man pleads guilty in catalytic converter crime spree

BY BRUNO MATARAZZO JR.  
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WOLCOTT — A 30-year-old local man confessed to being the ringleader of a catalytic converter theft and trafficking operation that stretched to New York and New Jersey, raking in hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Alexander Kolitsas pleaded guilty Monday at federal court in Hartford to interstate

transportation of stolen property and money laundering. He faces up to 20 years in prison when he is sentenced on Jan. 22, 2025

Kolitsas, who was released on a \$150,000 bond, ran the criminal operation through his business, Downpipe Depot and Recycling in East Hartford, federal prosecutors said.

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An image on Alexander Kolitsas' Facebook page shows an individual with a firearm in a warehouse filled with catalytic converters. The Wolcott man has pleaded guilty to being the ringleader of a catalytic converter theft and trafficking ring.

CONTRIBUTED/FACEBOOK

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For more than a year, Kolitsas bought stolen catalytic converters from a network of thieves and sold them to recycling centers across state lines, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. He met suppliers late at night, sometimes behind a family restaurant, and give them instructions on the hottest converters to

swipe.

Some of Kolitsas' hauls exceeded \$200,000. The high scrap value of catalytic converters, which contain precious metals such as platinum, palladium and rhodium, turned the devices into prime targets for thieves across the country.

The average scrap price for catalytic converters now varies between \$300 and \$1,500, depending on the

model and type of precious metal component.

Kolitsas' attorney, Martin J. Minnella, described his client as a misguided "good kid" who thought he was running a legitimate business and even kept open records of his transactions.

"He did everything in the open," Minnella said.

His client's decision to plead guilty came after all eight of the co-defendants in

the case pleaded guilty and were expected to testify against Kolitsas at his trial, he said.

Authorities seized more than \$166,000 in cash and other assets, which Kolitsas has agreed to forfeit as part of his plea agreement.

This includes a Ford Transit Van and a 2016 Polaris Slingshot he purchased with the proceeds from the thefts.