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girlfriend, Ebonie Hampton.

Feb. 15, 2013

Feb. 15—TAMPA — Two days after their house was searched, Jermell Cornelius Hickman married his girlfriend, Ebonie Hampton.

Then on Valentine's Day, the newlyweds were arrested together.

They pleaded not guilty to a 37-count federal indictment that accuses them of identity theft and other tax-refund-fraud-related offenses. The IRS says the pair took more than \$388,000 from U.S. taxpayers using stolen personal information.

They were given court-appointed attorneys after saying they couldn't afford to pay for legal representation.

According to court documents, IRS investigators searched the couple's home at 3611 E. Caracas St. on Oct. 10 looking for evidence of stolen-identity tax-refund fraud. As the search was about to begin, Hickman pulled up in a white Cadillac Escalade.

Hickman, who has a child with Hampton, told investigators that a gun they found belonged to him. He was arrested on a federal weapons offense and released on bail Oct. 11, according to court documents.

The next day, he and Hampton wed, according to a marriage license on file with the Hillsborough County Clerk's Office.

Investigators connected fraudulent tax returns filed using the couple's address to Victor Williams, who had asked his uncle, a pastor for an Alabama church, to help him by laundering fraudulent income tax refund checks through the church's bank account, authorities say.

Last week, Williams pleaded guilty to federal charges of conspiracy, theft of public

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to Williams. After Faison was caught, he agreed to cooperate and allowed investigators to monitor phone calls between him and his nephew, according to court pleadings

Agents say they traced some of the fraudulent tax refunds and connected them to tax returns with addresses in care of Hickman and Hampton.

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