



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

**Frank J. Magill,
United States Attorney**

David Anderson, Public Affairs Specialist
(612) 664-5684; cell: (612) 730-2251

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2008

Jury convicts defendant connected to the largest indoor marijuana growing operation in state history

The last defendant remaining at trial connected to what may be the largest indoor marijuana growing operation in Minnesota history was convicted yesterday in federal court.

After nearly three hours of deliberation, a jury found, Lai Pham, 36, Shakopee; guilty on one count of conspiracy to manufacture 1,000 or more marijuana plants. During the trial on Dec. 8, two other defendants, Tung Nguyen, 34, Bloomington, and Tuan Dang, 32, Inver Grove Heights, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy.

Prior to the seven-day trial, the six other defendants each pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy. They are: Thin Do, 31, Bloomington; Nam Nguyen, 33, Roseville; Thuong Nguyen, 45, Brooklyn Park; Sonny Pham, 44, Eagan; Hung Le, 48, Maplewood; and Christian Pham, 33, Brooklyn Park. All nine defendants were indicted on May 6.

“Our office is pleased with this verdict and plea agreements,” said U.S. Attorney Frank J. Magill. “This was considered by many agents to be the largest indoor marijuana grow operation in Minnesota’s history, one comparable to those in other parts of the country, and we are proud to have prosecuted this case. It was the result of the tremendous efforts of all of our law enforcement partners, and we thank them.”

Their indictment stated that from August 2007 through April 11, 2008, the nine defendants did unlawfully, knowingly and intentionally conspire with each other and others to manufacture 1,000 or more marijuana plants. During the April 10 arrests, authorities seized more than 5,963 marijuana plants during the execution of 18 federal search warrants in the Twin Cities. Eight grow houses were discovered at two residences in Maplewood and single residences in Brooklyn Park, Burnsville, Coon Rapids, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights and Lakeville.

Previously, in October 2007, law enforcement executed a search warrant at a residence in Brooklyn Park which evidence at trial linked to the conspiracy. As a result, more than 7,000 marijuana plants were seized in connection with this conspiracy.

Evidence presented during the trial showed that each of the residences involved was utilizing a rotating crop schedule in order to have multiple harvests in one year. The jury heard evidence that it cost on average \$25,000 to set up an indoor grow operation. A marijuana grow house which harvests 1,000 plants in a given year could result in more than \$1 million profit.

“The multiple arrests, drug, and asset seizures that occurred in this investigation are attributed to the outstanding law enforcement partnerships between DEA, West Hennepin County Drug Task Force, Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office Narcotics Unit, United States Attorney’s Office, and other participating federal, state, and local agencies,” said Dan Moren, assistant special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Minneapolis District Office. “The efforts of this significant enforcement operation, orchestrated by the partner agencies, have dismantled a sophisticated indoor marijuana growing and distribution organization.”

“I am extremely proud of the West Metro Drug Task Force and the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office for originating this case and then collaborating with many other agencies,” said Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek. “This is an example of how law enforcement works together to advance public safety.”

The defendants each face a potential maximum penalty of life in prison. United States District Court Chief Judge Michael Davis will sentence the defendants at a future date.

This case is the result of an investigation by the DEA, the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office Narcotics Unit, and the West Hennepin County Drug Task Force, with assistance from both the Northwest and Southwest Hennepin County drug task forces, the Dakota County Drug Task Force, the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office Narcotics Unit, the Minneapolis Gang Strike Force, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division, the Minnesota National Guard, and the police departments of Burnsville, Bloomington, Brooklyn Park, Coon Rapids, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights, Lakeville, Maplewood and St. Paul. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney LeeAnn K. Bell.