

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey
401 Market Street, Fourth Floor
Camden, New Jersey 08101



Christopher J. Christie, U.S. Attorney

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Assistant U.S. Attorneys

RONALD CHILLEMI

856-757-5232

DEBORAH PRISINZANO-MIKKELSEN

856-757-5152

carr1127.rel

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Vineland Man Convicted of Cocaine and
Heroin Distribution Conspiracy

(More)

Greg Reinert, PAO
Public Affairs Office

856-757-5233
973-645-2888

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CAMDEN – A Puerto Rican man living in Vineland was convicted by a federal jury today for the distribution of cocaine and heroin, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

After 12 hours of deliberations, which began on Nov. 21, a jury convicted Luis Carrion-Soto, 33, of two of the three counts contained in a Second Superseding Indictment, which was returned on Oct. 30, 2007. Carrion-Soto was convicted of a drug trafficking conspiracy and possession with intent to distribute cocaine and heroin. The jury acquitted the defendant on one count of possession with intent to distribute cocaine.

The case was tried by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ronald Chillemi and Deborah Prisinzano-Mikkelsen.

According to the Indictment, Carrion-Soto conspired with Ferdinand Maldonado, Eugenio Toro and Margarito Diaz, along with others, in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine in the Vineland area.

During the trial, the jury heard the testimony of 7 government witnesses and viewed dozens of pieces of evidence regarding Carrion-Soto's scheme to provide cocaine and heroin to other drug dealers in the Vineland area.

In convicting the defendant, the jury found that the defendant, along with Maldonado and others, possessed and distributed more than 500 grams of cocaine and 100 grams of heroin.

According to testimony and evidence presented at trial, Carrion-Soto admitted to law enforcement authorities that he was part of a cocaine smuggling ring based in Puerto Rico. The ring obtained kilograms of cocaine in Medellin, Colombia, and transported the drugs via boat to Puerto Rico, and ultimately shipped the cocaine to the defendant in the United States via U.S. Postal contract carrier. Carrion-Soto then distributed the cocaine to other drug dealers in New Jersey.

The defendant was apprehended on Interstate 95 in South Carolina and was found to be in possession of 1 kilogram of cocaine and 125 grams of heroin. According to trial testimony, shortly after Carrion-Soto's arrest in South Carolina, he admitted to authorities that he was traveling to Florida to meet a potential customer.

Ferdinand Maldonado was arrested in July 2006 on a one-count Indictment, which charged him with conspiring with others, including Felipe Telleria, 34, of Vineland, to distribute and possess with intent to distribute 500 grams or more of cocaine. Maldonado entered a guilty plea on March 30, 2007. Telleria pleaded guilty on March 9, 2007, to a charge of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute 5 kilograms or more of cocaine and 50 grams or more of crack cocaine.

U.S. District Judge Jerome B. Simandle, who presided over the 7-day trial, scheduled sentencing for March 7, 2008.

On Count One of the Second Superseding Indictment, which charges conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute 500 grams or more of cocaine, Carrion-Soto faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 5 years in prison with a maximum statutory penalty of 40 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000. Count Three, charging possession with intent to distribute 500 grams or more of cocaine and 100 grams or more of heroin, carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 5 years in prison with a maximum statutory penalty of 40 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Simandle will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited the Special Agents of the DEA, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerald P. McAleer in Newark, the Cumberland County Narcotics Task Force, under the direction of Cumberland County Prosecutor Ronald J. Casella, and Police Officers with the Florence County Sheriff's Office in South Carolina, under the direction of Sheriff William Kenney Boone, with developing the investigation which resulted in the conviction.

The Cumberland County Narcotics Task Force is comprised of the Cumberland County Prosecutor's Office, DEA, FBI, ATF, New Jersey State Police, Vineland Police Department, Bridgeton Police Department, and the Millville Police Department.

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Defense Attorney: Ronald B. Thompson, Esq. Voorhees