



Department of Justice

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JURY CONVICTS LEADER OF HEROIN TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION

Faces mandatory sentence of life imprisonment

COLUMBUS – A United States District Court jury here today convicted Ronald Kelsor, 54, of Columbus of leading a heroin trafficking conspiracy out of houses in southern and southeastern Columbus from 2004 until he was arrested as part of an investigation that eventually led to federal drug trafficking charges against 32 people. Kelsor now faces life in prison.

Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, Anthony C. Marotta, Assistant Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Union County Sheriff Rocky W. Nelson, Columbus Police Chief Walter Distelzweig, and Chris Sadowski, Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and other state and local law enforcement agencies participating in the investigation announced the verdict returned today after a trial that began August 10 before Senior U.S. District Judge James L. Graham. The jury deliberated three hours before reaching its verdict.

During the trial, the government presented 19 witnesses who testified to Kelsor's leadership role in the conspiracy. The government also introduced as evidence transcripts of 56 of the approximately 10,000 wire communications agents and officers monitored during the investigation between February and April 2008. The transcripts recounted phone calls between Kelsor and others discussing the price and delivery of heroin.

The jury convicted Kelsor of one count of conspiracy to distribute more than 1,000 grams of heroin, two counts of possession with intent to distribute heroin, 15 counts of unlawful use of a communications facility, two counts of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime and two counts of being a felon in possession of a firearm. Because of Kelsor's prior criminal record, his conviction on the conspiracy charge carries a mandatory term of life imprisonment. Convictions on the four gun crimes carry a total additional sentence of at least 40 years imprisonment consecutive to other time served. Judge Graham will set a date for sentencing.

The investigation, known as "Operation Alley Way" because the organization trafficking heroin along U.S. Route 33 from Marysville into Athens County began in April 2007 when information shared between Union County Sheriff Rocky Nelson's office and the Columbus Division of Police indicated that multiple agencies were investigating the heroin trafficking operation. The DEA provided resources and support for various electronic and standard investigative techniques during the course of the investigation.

The investigation found that Kelsor, along with Victor Woodson, Earnestine Bankston, and Billy C. Lee operated the conspiracy out of a house in South Columbus. Woodson, Bankston and Lee pleaded guilty to conspiracy. They are scheduled to be sentenced in September.

Kelsor obtained quantities of heroin from David J. McReynolds, Keith S. Hardy, Edmund W. Plunk and Mandell Cantrell. All four pleaded guilty to conspiracy. They are scheduled to be sentenced in September. Hardy has been sentenced to 78 months imprisonment and Plunk to 144 months.

Seventeen co-defendants have pleaded guilty and received sentences ranging from probation to 144 months imprisonment. Twelve co-defendants have pleaded guilty and are awaiting sentencing. Two of the original defendants are deceased.

Teams of federal, state and local law enforcement agents arrested Kelsor and others involved in the organization beginning with a roundup on May 8, 2008.

Lockhart commended the cooperative investigation by DEA agents, Union County Sheriff's and Columbus Police detectives, and ATF agents. along with Assistant U.S. Attorneys Don Pashayan and Salvador A. Dominguez, who prosecuted the case.

Other agencies participating in the task force include the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation in Ohio Attorney General Richard Cordray's Office, the Ohio State Highway Patrol, the Fairfield Hocking Major Crimes Unit, and the police departments in Westerville and Upper Arlington. The Ohio National Guard provided intelligence analysis in the investigation. The Athens County Sheriff's Office and the Athens Police Department assisted with the arrests.

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