



U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney Eastern District of Arkansas

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LEADER OF NATIONWIDE DRUG CONSPIRACY PLEADS GUILTY

Little Rock -- Bud Cummins, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, announced today that Rachel Juvera, 55, pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than 1000 kilograms of marijuana. Her husband, Armando Juvera, 56, also pled guilty to possessing marijuana with intent to distribute. Rachel faces a statutory sentence of 10 years to Life with up to a \$4 million fine or both and eight years supervised release. Armando faces not less than 5 years to 40 years with a \$4 million fine or both and eight years supervised release.

This case was the result of an extensive three year Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). According to the Fifth Superseding Indictment, the Juvera's, from Chula Vista, California, have operated a large scale family drug trafficking organization since 1997. The organization obtained the marijuana from Mexico and distributed it throughout the United States including Arkansas, Illinois, North Carolina, and Oregon. Agents linked numerous drug trafficking arrests to this organization with marijuana seizures that include 400 pounds in Arkansas in February 1997, 1250 pounds in Mississippi in November 1999, 240 pounds in Oklahoma in September 2003, 138 pounds in California in December 2004, 165 pounds in Texas in January 2004, 270 pounds in Kansas and 101 pounds in New Mexico in April 2004, and 80 pounds in Arkansas in May 2005. Agents also linked numerous seizures of marijuana at the San Ysidro Port of Entry to the Juvera drug smuggling organization.

"This is an important case. We are prepared to prove that these individuals distributed over a ton of marijuana," stated Cummins.

In February 2005, DEA and ICE agents from Little Rock and California executed a search warrant of the Juvera residence at 558 Wisteria in Chula Vista, California. Agents arrested Armando Juvera, and two co-defendants. At the residence, agents seized 36 pounds of marijuana and documents showing the vast extent of drug trafficking by the Juvera family.

Rachel Juvera was not at the residence and remained a fugitive until ICE agents in conjunction with the Mexican Federal Police arrested her in Mexico in September 2005. Two defendants believed to play leadership roles in the conspiracy, Benito Naito-Gastelum and Gloria Cardenas-Kennedy, are still fugitives in Mexico. The United States Attorney's Office is seeking extradition of these individuals through the Department of State and the Mexican Government.

Investigation of the Juvera organization has resulted in the conviction of 17 individuals in five separate cases. Rachel and Armando Juvera's daughters, Lorena Juvera Gastelum and Veronica Juvera are scheduled to appear in court later today. Lorena Juvera-Gastelum is the wife of fugitive Benito Naito-Gastelum. Both daughters are from Chula Vista California. Rachel Juvera's son, Robert Arnett, pled guilty in September 2005 and is awaiting sentencing. All five are currently in federal custody.

From events arising out of this drug conspiracy, the U.S. Attorney's Office is also prosecuting a capital murder case involving three defendants, Vertis Clay, Calvin Stovall, and Darryl Walker. That case resulted in the torture and murder of an individual in Pine Bluff and, therefore, the Department of Justice is seeking the death penalty against Vertis Clay.

In addition to DEA and ICE, other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies have assisted in this case including: Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI), Arkansas State Police, Arkansas Highway Police, Pine Bluff Police Department, and the Sherwood Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Joe Volpe prosecuted the Juvera's cases for the United States.

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