



# Department of Justice

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Northern District of Georgia

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## **MEXICAN DRUG TRAFFICKERS ARRESTED HERE** **AS PART OF NATIONWIDE "PROJECT CORONADO" TAKEDOWN**

***More Than \$1 Million, 800 lbs of Marijuana, 5 kilos of Cocaine,  
2 lbs of Methamphetamine & Numerous Assault Weapons Seized***

ATLANTA, GA - The United States Attorney's Office announced today that DEA Strike Force Atlanta, composed of agents from DEA and other agents from the David G. Wilhelm Strike Force, which includes the FBI, ICE, IRS, the U.S. Marshal's Service, and local metro-Atlanta law enforcement agencies, have arrested eleven defendants within the past two days on drug trafficking and money laundering charges, as part of the nationwide "Project Coronado" drug takedown, announced in Washington D.C. earlier today.

MARIA BEJAR-MANZO, 40, an illegal alien; GERARDO RODRIGUEZ-SALGADO, 42, in the United States on a visa; CAMILLO ARATH SPORT-SILVA, 41, an illegal alien; LUIS ALBERTO LARA-LOPEZ, 23, originally from Mexico; FELIX IGNACIO LEMUS-GUERRA, 24, originally from Mexico; MARCO LARA-GONZALEZ, 27, an illegal alien; IGNACIO LARA-GONZALEZ, 20, an illegal alien; OSCAR VARGAS MORFEN, 28, an illegal alien; GILBERTO AVALOS-RIVERA, 40, a resident alien from Mexico; ROBERTO HUFF, 43, residence unknown; and ASUNSION MARTINEZ, JR., 21, residence unknown, were identified and arrested after a two-year long nationwide investigation of the "La Familia" Mexican drug cartel, which had been operating in numerous cities throughout the United States, including Atlanta, Chicago, Charlotte, and Dallas.

Acting United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said of the arrests and nationwide operation, "These arrests are the most recent evidence that greed-driven Mexican drug cartels have infiltrated and are actively at work in Atlanta and other major cities in the United States, peddling illegal controlled substances that poison and degrade our communities. The United States Attorney's Office and federal, state and local law enforcement agents will continue to work to stop the flow of drugs and money, and the violence that accompanies drug dealing. This nationwide operation, coordinated by many agencies located in different states, reflects law enforcement's latest efforts in this regard."

Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division said, "Today, through Project Coronado we have impacted La Familia Michoacana, a violent poly drug organization with cells operating throughout the United States including the greater Atlanta metropolitan area. Working with our federal, state and local counterparts in the David Wilhelm Strike Force, we have targeted and dismantled portions of this criminal enterprise bringing to the federal judicial system elements responsible for the distribution of hundreds of pounds of marijuana and the collection of millions of dollars in drug proceeds."

"The operation to dismantle the La Familia drug trafficking organization in the United States demonstrates an unprecedented level of partnership and coordination at the local, state and federal levels. We at ICE are proud to have played an important role in the operation and look forward to continuing to work with our law enforcement partners to target these criminal organizations," said ICE Assistant Secretary John Morton.

According to Acting United States Attorney Yates and the documents filed in court: GILBERTO AVALOS-RIVERA and ROBERTO HUFF were arrested in south-metro Atlanta on October 19, 2009, allegedly in connection with the seizure of more than 800 pounds of marijuana. The marijuana was found when DEA agents stopped and searched two vehicles departing a gated, residential property located in Griffin, believed to be used as a distribution facility by a group known to transport drugs and money for the La Familia cartel.

Agents searched two additional properties located in Ellenwood, Georgia, and Rex, Georgia, both of which had been allegedly identified through investigation as being used by this same transportation cell to conduct its operations. Agents allegedly found more than \$1 million in suspected drug proceeds and numerous weapons, including assault rifles, and arrested OSCAR VARGAS MORFEN, MARCO LARA-GONZALEZ and IGNACIO LARA-GONZALEZ. MORFEN had been identified previously as allegedly working for this transportation cell.

On October 20, 2009, agents arrested CAMILLO ARATH SPORT-SILVA AND MARIA BEJAR-MANZO, a husband and wife, who were indicted the previous day on federal drug and money laundering charges for their role in distributing marijuana and drug proceeds for the La Familia cartel. BEJAR-MANZO was arrested at her home, where agents found 2 pounds of methamphetamine, an assault rifle, a handgun, and three small children. SPORT-SILVA was arrested driving in New Mexico, along with ASUNSION MARTINEZ, JR., who also had been identified as an alleged drug distributor for the organization.

Agents searched on October 20, 2009, several other houses located in Gwinnett and DeKalb counties alleged to be used by the La Familia cartel to store drugs and money, ultimately seizing 5 kilograms of cocaine and large sums of currency. LUIS ALBERTO LARA-LOPEZ and FELIX IGNACIO LEMUS-GUERRA were arrested as a result of these searches.

Over the past two days, the Strike Force seized: five kilograms of cocaine; two

pounds of methamphetamine in the form of “ice;” over 800 pounds of marijuana; over \$1 million in currency; various weapons, and one vehicle, found with a so-called “trap” containing five kilograms of cocaine inside.

All of the individuals arrested are alleged to be connected to the “La Familia” drug organization. The arrested persons appeared in federal court on October 20 and 21, facing drug distribution and money laundering charges. Other defendants related to the investigation are being prosecuted on state charges by the Gwinnett County District Attorney’s Office.

(NEWS MEDIA NOTE: A news conference announcing the nationwide results of Project Coronado was held this morning in Washington D.C. To receive a copy of the national news release and for other questions and inquiries on the wide-ranging investigation, contact Laura Sweeney at the Justice Department Public Affairs Office at 202-616-2777.)

The U.S. Attorney’s Office in Atlanta recommends parents and children learn about the dangers of drugs at the following web site: [www.justthinktwice.com](http://www.justthinktwice.com).

Members of the public are reminded that the indictments and complaints only contain charges. The defendants are presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove the defendants' guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the David G. Wilhelm Strike Force, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), and the Gwinnett County District Attorney’s Office.

Assistant United States Attorneys Cassandra Schansman, Jeffrey Davis, and Scott Hulsey are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, Acting United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is [www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan).