



Department of Justice

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**MANAGER OF LOCAL CELL FOR MEXICO-BASED DRUG TRAFFICKING
ORGANIZATION
PLEADS GUILTY IN THE MIDDLE OF TRIAL**

***Morfin Was Found and Arrested at Cartel Stash House Where \$1.3 Million in Drug
Proceeds Was Hidden in Attic***

ATLANTA, GA - OSCAR MORFIN VARGAS, 29, a citizen of Mexico residing illegally in the metro Atlanta area, today pleaded guilty to federal drug and money laundering conspiracy charges for his role in distributing more than a thousand kilograms of marijuana in the United States and then returning millions of dollars in drug proceeds to Mexico. MORFIN's trial on the federal charges began yesterday.

"After this defendant got a close-up view of the government's evidence against him during the first day of trial, he decided to plead guilty and admit trafficking marijuana and shipping drug money back to Mexico," said United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates. "The hard work of the members of the David Wilhelm OCDETF Strike Force has resulted in yet another blow to the Mexican drug traffickers who use Atlanta as a hub for their criminal activity."

Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division said, "This investigation and prosecution is yet another example of the continued pressure put on Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations by the DEA, the United States Attorney's Office and our outstanding federal, state and local law enforcement counterparts in the greater Atlanta area. This defendant's change of heart in the midst of trial speaks volumes to the fine investigative work conducted in this matter."

"The Georgia State Patrol works closely with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in the ongoing task of drug interdiction," said Colonel Bill Hitchens, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Safety. "Each agency provides critical resources to assist in the successful prosecution of those involved."

Fayette County Sheriff's Office Captain Jody Thomas said of the case, "We are proud of our relationship with DEA, and this case is an example of what good cooperative effort

between law enforcement agencies can accomplish.”

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges and evidence at trial: For approximately four months starting in July 2009, DEA agents, assisted by local authorities, including Georgia State Patrol, the Fayette County Sheriff’s Office, and the United States Marshal’s Service, investigated MORFIN and his involvement in managing a local cell of a Mexico-based drug trafficking organization. In three separate incidents involving the cell, agents seized approximately 911 pounds of marijuana and \$1.8 million in proceeds. Secretly intercepted telephone conversations, seized drug ledgers, and agents’ surveillance confirmed MORFIN’s involvement in moving the seized money and drugs.

On October 3, 2009, DEA agents saw a pickup truck leaving a residence in Ellenwood, Georgia, belonging to MORFIN. Georgia State Patrol Troopers conducted a traffic stop on Highway I-20 of the pickup truck, which contained 4-wheel ATV’s, one of which was found with more than \$435,000 hidden in its tires. Intercepted telephone communications, some directly involving MORFIN, showed his involvement in the incident.

On October 19, 2009, a Texas-based commercial truck driver drove a rig loaded with approximately 911 pounds of marijuana, hidden in a load of papayas, to a secluded multi-acre residence located in Griffin, Georgia that was being used by the local cell as a drug off-loading site. DEA Strike Force, Marshal’s Service, and Fayette County authorities, seized the marijuana the following day. The tractor-trailer driver, GILBERTO AVALOS RIVERA, was arrested and has been tried and convicted in federal court for transporting the marijuana. Intercepted telephone communications, some directly involving MORFIN, again showed his involvement in this drug incident.

The final incident occurred at a residential property in Rex, Georgia, where MORFIN was found and arrested on the night of October 19, 2009. Intercepted telephone calls, including those involving MORFIN, revealed that he was attempting to hide money in response to the seizure of marijuana that had just occurred at the Griffin property. When agents arrived at the residence, MORFIN provided his consent for agents to search the area. Forty-four bundles of tape-wrapped money exceeding more than \$1.3 million was found in the attic. The packaging was the same as that of one of the bundles seized on October 3, 2009, from the 4-wheel ATV that had left MORFIN’s residence. In addition, a Taurus handgun was found in the master bedroom where MORFIN had been sleeping. Drug ledgers seized from the Rex, Griffin, and Ellenwood properties confirmed the scope of the drug activity and MORFIN’s involvement in managing the local operation.

Although his trial began earlier this week, MORFIN pleaded guilty today at the beginning of the day’s proceedings to conspiring to distribute more than 1,000 kilograms of marijuana; and conspiring to launder drug proceeds. MORFIN has also accepted responsibility for the gun found at the Rex, Georgia, residence. In the plea agreement, MORFIN agreed to a sentence of 150 months, or 12 and a half years, in prison, pending

approval by the Court.

The investigation of the case was led by DEA agents from the David Wilhelm OCDETF Strike Force in Atlanta. Other federal and local agencies assisted, including the United States Marshal's Service and the Fayette County Sheriff's Department.

The prosecution was headed by Assistant United States Attorney Jeffrey W. Davis, assisted by Assistant United States Attorney G. Scott Hulsey.

For further information, please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charlyse 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.