



Department of Justice

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Northern District of Georgia

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“OPERATION SPIDER WEB” SNAGS COCAINE, METH AND WEAPONS; 15 INDICTED ON RELATED DRUG TRAFFICKING & FIREARMS CRIMES

Over \$1,000,000 in Cash Seized During Investigation

ATLANTA, GA -- In the past 24 hours, federal, state and local law enforcement agencies of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), have concluded search and arrest actions in Cobb County and today, with the United States Attorney’s Office, announce that 15 individuals have been indicted for alleged drug trafficking and firearms-related crimes stemming from the large-scale investigation, code-named “Operation Spider Web.”

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said of the takedown and the case, “The U.S. Attorney's office targets the largest drug trafficking organizations in the district, so that we can reduce the drug trafficking and violence not only in the state of Georgia but the other parts of the country that these organizations touch. Operation Spider Web involves 15 defendants who are alleged to have distributed cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana using tire stores as fronts, and tires as drug packaging. The takedown of this case has a direct impact on the community to make Atlanta safer, with less drugs and fewer guns on the streets.”

“Georgia residents can sleep better tonight knowing that an organized criminal ring has been hit,” said Brock Nicholson, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Office overseeing Georgia and the Carolinas. “This case demonstrates yet again how law enforcement in Atlanta is committed to working together to disrupt and dismantle criminal networks.”

Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division said, “DEA and its law enforcement counterparts orchestrated a well-planned and coordinated assault against a high-level poly-drug distribution network. Because of the unified effort between DEA and its law enforcement counterparts, this organization will no longer be able to wreak havoc on our community.”

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Special Agent in Charge, Gregory K. Gant said, "The mission of ATF is unwavering--we fight violent crime by investigating and prosecuting those who criminally use firearms that cause immeasurable damage to our communities. Today's enforcement activity is a perfect example of the law enforcement community working together to remove these violent criminals from its streets."

Cobb County Sheriff Neil Warren, on behalf of the Marietta-Cobb-Smyrna Organized Crime Intelligence Task Force (MCS), said, "We often work in conjunction with other local, state and federal agencies in order to maximize our resources in combating illegal activity in our community. These cooperative efforts, especially in the metro area, are especially effective in letting the criminal element know we are all serious about protecting and serving the citizens in our jurisdictions. Job well done."

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges, and other information presented in court: In May 2009, federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies began investigating a drug trafficking organization operating in the metro-Atlanta area and elsewhere. The organization allegedly coordinated the receipt and distribution of cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana throughout Atlanta and elsewhere, using firearms in furtherance of its illegal activities. The indictment alleges that members of the organization hid, transported and stored illegal drugs and drug money inside of tires that were then either placed on or inside drug delivery vehicles.

As part of today's takedown, agents searched two tires shops, "Alex Tires and Rims" in Marietta, Georgia, and "Emmy Tires" in Griffin, Georgia. Both tire shops were allegedly operated by SANTIAGO VILLANUEVA PINEDA. Agents also executed three search warrants, including at the tire businesses used by the criminal organization as fronts for its illegal activities. Today's takedown ensnared 13 defendants, with the arrest of 8 additional individuals on state drug charges or for immigration offenses. Items seized during the takedown included 22 guns, several kilograms of cocaine and methamphetamine, a meth lab, over \$30,000 in cash, and several vehicles. Those seizures supplement the approximately \$1,000,000, 75 kilograms of cocaine, over 11 pounds of methamphetamine, 16 firearms, and two grenade hulls already seized in the investigation.

Earlier this week, a federal grand jury returned a ten-count indictment related to "Operation Spider Web," which was unsealed today with the arrests. The indictment charges the defendants with various criminal offenses including conspiring to traffic over five kilograms of cocaine, over 100 kilograms of marijuana, and over 500 grams of methamphetamine; substantive drug trafficking charges; and possession of firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking crimes:

1. SANTIAGO VILLANUEVA PINEDA, a/k/a "Alex," 36, of Marietta, Georgia;

2. RAMIRO ALVARADO GONZALEZ, a/k/a “Mori,” a/k/a “Moreno,” 25, of Marietta, Georgia;
3. JAMES TORRES, a/k/a “El Gordo,” 28, of Marietta, Georgia;
4. TARSICIO BRAVO-CARBAJAL, a/k/a “Chicho,” a/k/a “Chucho,” 53, of Marietta, Georgia;
5. BERNALDO MOLINA-CARDENAS, a/k/a “Berna,” 49, of Marietta, Georgia;
6. ELEAZAR AGUIRRE RIVERA, 27, of Cartersville, Georgia;
7. JUVENTINO BAZA, 43, of Marietta, Georgia;
8. PABLO GARCIA, a/k/a “Enrique Farias,” 34, of Cartersville, Georgia;
9. WILBER AVALOS PEREZ, 36, of Smyrna, Georgia;
10. JOSE CARLOS SOTO-PINEDA, a/k/a “Pedro Mendoza,” 29, of Sandy Springs, Georgia;
11. JOSE PATINO-CHAVEZ, a/k/a “Markos Jaimes,” 38, of Marietta, Georgia;
12. ISAIAS MONDRAGON, a/k/a “Fat Boy,” 30, of Powder Springs, Georgia;
13. NARCISO FLORES-ORTIZ, a/k/a “Chicho,” 33, of Smyrna, Georgia;
14. GREGORY EARL HARRISON, 40, of Marietta, Georgia; and
15. CHADWICK HUDSPETH, 41, of Atlanta, Georgia.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment contains only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government’s burden to prove a defendant’s guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

The investigation and prosecution of this case is a coordinated effort through the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, which is comprised of Special Agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations (ICE-HSI); the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); and the Marietta-Cobb-Smyrna Organized Crime Intelligence Task Force (MCS), which is comprised of officers from Cobb County Sheriff’s Office, Cobb County Police Department, Marietta Police Department, Smyrna Police Department, Kennesaw Police Department, Acworth Police Department and Powder Springs Police Department, along with the Cobb County District Attorney's Office.

Assistant United States Attorneys Kim S. Dammers, Ryan Scott Ferber and Gerald Sachs are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, 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.