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34 ALLEGED GANGSTER DISCIPLES AND ASSOCIATES FACE DRUG CHARGES

CHICAGO -- An undercover investigation of organized cocaine, crack cocaine and heroin trafficking that earned as much as \$10,000 a day in and near the Rockwell Gardens public housing complex on the city's west side culminated today in charges against 34 alleged street gang-affiliated drug dealers and others, many of whom were arrested in a pre-dawn operation. Federal and local law enforcement officials announced the arrests and charges against the alleged members and associates of the Gangster Disciples street gang, alleging that they participated in a conspiracy to distribute powder and crack cocaine and heroin, often accompanied by beatings of their own colleagues and other related violence. The federal charges announced today are the latest round in a decade-long sustained effort to disrupt the violent drug-trafficking activity in Chicago involving the Gangster Disciples, one of the city's most entrenched street gangs, while similar cases recently have targeted the gang's suburban expansion. Today's arrests -- concentrated in the 11th Police District, which had one of the city's highest homicide rates last year -- are also part of the *Project Safe Neighborhoods* strategy to reduce gun violence, announced Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois.

Mr. Fitzgerald announced the charges together with Lester A. Davis, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Inspector General for Region V; Richard Sanders, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Drug Enforcement Administration; and Chicago Police Supt. Terry Hillard. The U.S. Marshal's Service assisted in executing the arrest warrants today. The investigation, which began in March 2000, was conducted under the umbrella of the High Intensity Drug-Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF.)

"If we can drive terrorists from the caves of Tora Bora, then we ought to be just as committed to driving street gang drug-traffickers from public housing in Chicago," Mr. Fitzgerald said.

According to a 114-page DEA affidavit attached to the complaint, the investigation focused on a drug-trafficking organization -- composed of members of the GDs and led by **Richard Epps**, also known as "Icky Red" and "Bennie," 39, of Chicago -- which from at least July 1999 until October 2001 controlled the sale of crack cocaine and heroin at a 150-unit, 10-story building located at 340 S. Western Ave. in the Rockwell Gardens, a Chicago Housing Authority development. In late October 2001, Epps and his associates allegedly initiated a second drug-trafficking operation at the Saint Stephens Terrace Apartments, which has more than 500 subsidized housing units and is located across the street from 340 S. Western.

Epps and 33 co-defendants, who were being arrested last night and this morning, were charged with conspiracy to possess and distribute cocaine, crack cocaine and heroin from July 1999 to the present. All of the defendants taken into federal custody today were expected to have initial appearances later in the day before U.S. Magistrate Judge Ian H. Levin in U.S. District Court. A list

of the defendants is attached. At least four guns, along with some narcotics, were seized during the arrests early today.

The complaint alleges that Epps, who held various positions including “overseer” and “governor” in the hierarchy of the Gangster Disciples, at various times controlled drug sales at 340 S. Western, as well as other GD drug spots at Jackson and California avenues, Homan and Ohio avenues, and Francisco and Wilcox avenues. In mid-2001, Epps was removed from his leadership position because of his violent tendencies toward fellow gang members. In October 2001, he was restored to a leadership position, becoming the “assistant governor” over the west side of Chicago and placed back in control of the 340 S. Western building, according to information from cooperating witnesses outlined in the affidavit. The investigation relied on at least four cooperating witnesses, surveillance, interviews and court-authorized intercepted conversations on telephones used by Epps.

As part of the conspiracy, Epps allegedly required that individuals selling drugs at 340 S. Western dedicate the entire proceeds of sales from the first to the fourth days of every month to the “GD Nation.” On these so-called “nation days,” crack would be provided by Epps packaged in orange plastic bags, with the proceeds being used to pay for attorneys’ fees, bond and court costs for GD members; to pay for GD picnics and other gang-related expenses; and also to be distributed to high-ranking GD members. For the remainder of the month, Epps and other high-ranking GDs permitted gang members to sell drugs for their own profit.

During the investigation, undercover HUD special agents and Chicago police officers made approximately 50 purchases of crack cocaine in and around 340 S. Western from alleged street gang members. The transactions, involving various amounts ranging from \$100 to \$850 each, typically

were recorded on audio and video tape. During 2000 and 2001, the following defendants allegedly sold crack to undercover agents: **Travon Banks, David N. Bennett, Bobby E. Butts, Charles Butts; Derquann Butts, Donnell L. Cohn, Myron Coleman, Johnny N. Conner, Robert Ervin, Anthony N. Hall, Ranus L. Hall, Jerry Harrington, Lorenzo W. Johnson, Tommy E. Jones, Dwayne Lindsey, Willie L. Mobley, Robert L. Price; Brian K. Price, Tyrone D. Rucker, Stevie Thomas, Kenneth Williams, Darryl L. Wilson, and Michael E. Zolicoffer.**

In addition, the complaint identifies defendant **Lamont White**, also known as “G-Money,” as a former governor of the GDs who at one time was in charge of the drug sales at 340 S. Western and at other times assisted Epps when he was in control. At times when Epps was in charge, he would have a meeting at approximately 5 p.m. every Sunday to make sure everything was running smoothly, with approximately 20 to 30 gang members in attendance. Individuals who violated the gang’s rules were subjected to severe beatings, according to the charges.

The affidavit also describes an Oct. 2, 2001, meeting among some 40 GDs at Horan Park, located at Albany and Van Buren avenues, at which defendant **Sammy Armstead**, also known as “Sammy-O,” said he was the governor for the west side GDs. A tape recording of the meeting by a cooperating witness revealed a lively discussion among several individuals of the necessity of selling drugs on “nation days” and keeping the gang together, in spite of complaints from some gang members about not making enough money.

If convicted, all of the defendants charged today face a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment without parole and a maximum fine of \$4 million. Note, however, that the Court, will determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed under the United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The government is being represented by Assistant United States Attorneys Eric Sussman and John Lausch.

The public is reminded that complaints contain only charges and are not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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