

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Sept. 29, 2008

Former N.J. State Trooper Admits Receiving, Selling Rolex Watches Stolen by “Smash-and-Grab” Robbery Ring

(More)

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TRENTON – A former New Jersey State Trooper pleaded guilty today to receiving and selling Rolex watches stolen by a “smash-and-grab” jewelry store robbery ring, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Hiram Ortiz, 43, of Elizabeth, pleaded guilty to Count Nine of a 10-count, eight-defendant Superseding Indictment, charging him with receipt of stolen property, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott B. McBride. Following the guilty plea, U.S. District Judge Garrett E. Brown, Jr. set sentencing for Jan. 5.

The defendant faces a maximum statutory penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. In addition, Judge Brown must order that Ortiz make restitution to the victims of his crime.

During the plea hearing today, Ortiz admitted receiving and reselling Rolex watches stolen from in and out of New Jersey by a smash-and-grab jewelry store theft ring. Ortiz was among seven others involved in the ring who were indicted on July 23. His co-defendants are William Valentin, Regaldo Hernandez, Angel Concepcion, Valentin Cedenio, Hector Perez, Quadir Snell and Tanya Rivera.

Snell also pleaded guilty today before Judge Brown to Count Eight of the Superseding Indictment, charging him with robbing the Mayors Jewelers at the Mall of Georgia. Snell remains held without bail pending sentencing, also on Jan. 5.

Regaldo Hernandez and Angel Concepcion pleaded guilty before Judge Brown on Sept. 19 to Count One of the Superseding Indictment, which charges a conspiracy from July 2003 until September 2005 to commit smash-and-grab robberies of seven jewelry stores in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Florida. The victim jewelers were:

- Bailey, Banks & Biddle at the Garden State Mall in Paramus;
- Corbo Jewelers at the Rockaway Town Square Mall in Rockaway;
- J.E. Caldwell Company at the Court Mall in Upper Merion Township, Pa;
- Sherman & Sons Jewelers at the Bridgewater Commons Mall in Bridgewater;
- Mayors Jewelers at the Seminole Towne Center Mall in Sanford, Fla.;
- Mayors Jewelers at the Mall of Georgia in Buford, Ga.; and
- Ultra Diamond Outlet in Jackson Township.

Hernandez has been detained without bail since his arrest on June 19, 2006, by Investigators with the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office and Special Agents with the FBI. Concepcion is also being held without bail pending sentencing.

Valentin Cedeno pleaded guilty on Sept. 25 before U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson to Count One of the Superseding Indictment, which charged him with joining the conspiracy described above. Cedeno is also detained pending sentencing.

Tanya Rivera pleaded guilty on Sept. 26, before Judge Brown to a one-count Superseding Information charging her with misprision of felony for manning the getaway car and helping her accomplices escape after the March 22, 2004, robbery of Mayors Jewelers at the Mall of Georgia in Buford, Ga.

Valentin and Perez are scheduled for trial before Judge Brown on Oct. 7, 2008.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Brown will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The Judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent In Charge Weysan Dun in Newark; Investigators with the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Wayne J. Forrest; and Investigators with the Union County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Theodore J. Romankow, for the investigation leading to the Superseding Indictment and subsequent guilty pleas.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott B. McBride of the U.S. Attorney's Office Government Fraud Unit, and Douglas F. Herring of the U.S. Attorney's Violent Crimes Unit.

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Defense Counsel for Ortiz: John Tiffany, Esq., Newark