



Department of Justice

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FINAL FUGITIVE ARRESTED IN TENNIS SHOE DRUG SMUGGLING CASE

Belize police arrest Gary Seawell 12 years after indictment

COLUMBUS – Police in Belize have arrested Gary Seawell, 33, at a farmhouse near the village of Esperanza. A federal grand jury here indicted Seawell, his brothers Duane and Mark Seawell, and 69 other individuals in 1997, for running an operation which used couriers carrying drugs into the Columbus area hidden in the soles of tennis shoes.

Carter M. Stewart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, announced Seawell's arrest, which occurred yesterday.

According to the initial indictment returned in 1997 and a superseding indictment returned in 1998, the Seawells ran a marijuana and cocaine smuggling business starting in 1994, and, from July 1996 until the time of the indictment, they recruited and employed couriers and chaperones from central Ohio to transport the cocaine from Mexico.

The Seawells hired recruiters who offered young people, often college students, all-expense paid trips to Cancun if they agreed to make a side trip to Belize and wear a pair of tennis shoes they would be given in Belize back into the United States. The shoes contained approximately 1 kilogram of cocaine hidden in the soles.

Duane Seawell, 37, was arrested in Miami, Florida on February 20, 2007. Jamaican authorities expelled Duane Seawell for illegally entering the island nation and sent him back to Belize through Miami. ICE agents arrested him when he arrived on U.S. soil. Duane Seawell pleaded guilty on July 30, 2007 and was sentenced on December 7, 2007 to 17 years in prison.

Mark Seawell, 40, was arrested in Belize in early 2007. He has been fighting extradition since his arrest. Another extradition hearing is scheduled next month for Mark.

“For more than ten years, Gary Seawell and his brothers were fugitives from justice,” Stewart said. “They have lived off of their ill-gotten gains, while many of the young men and women they recruited to work for them were in prison.” Seawell's co-defendants received sentences ranging from a year and a day to 204 months imprisonment.

Stewart commended the agents with the IRS Criminal Investigation, the Columbus Division of Police Narcotics Bureau, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, and the Ohio National Guard - Counterdrug Task Force who conducted the investigation, as well as Assistant U.S. Attorneys Robyn Hahnert and Kevin Kelley, who prosecuted the case.

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