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October 6, 2011

MULTIPLE ARRESTS IN ROUNDUP OF ALLEGED DRUG DEALERS IN ALLENTOWN

ALLENTOWN, PA - Federal, state and local law enforcement officers arrested more than a dozen people this morning, on state and federal charges, in connection with drug activity in and around the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street area of Allentown. The arrests and the unsealing of nine indictments<sup>1</sup> and two federal criminal complaints were announced by United States Attorney Zane David Memeger, FBI Special Agent-in-Charge George C. Venizelos, Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin, Allentown Police Department Chief Roger Maclean, and Pennsylvania State Police Major Huascar Rivera.

A total of 14 defendants are charged federally with various drug and/or weapons offenses (see attachment). Of those 14 defendants, nine were arrested this morning including: William Bonilla, Francisco Cartagena, Javier Cartagena, William Gonzalez, Angel Rosario, Jovani Rosario, Gilberto Santiago, Luis Santiago, and Pedro Vazquez. Still being sought are: Dagoberto Irizarry, Ishmael Rivera, and Edwin Rodriguez. Defendants Steven Rodriguez and David Roman were already being held at the Lehigh County Prison on other charges.

The charges allege that certain defendants were dealing cocaine base (“crack”) primarily in and around an area of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street known as “the Ward.” According to the indictments, there were numerous instances where defendants were dealing these drugs within 1,000 feet of area public schools, including Sheridan Elementary School and Harrison-Morton Middle school. Four of the defendants (William Gonzalez, Ishmael Rivera, Edwin Rodriguez, Pedro Vazquez) have been indicted on weapons charges that include selling a stolen gun.

“The 2nd Street Area of Allentown has in recent history been plagued by violence and drug trafficking activity,” said Memeger. “Because citizens came forward with information about the illegal activity, we were able to take action with our fellow law enforcement partners to remove nearly a dozen dangerous individuals from the community. Effective law enforcement requires community involvement, and today's arrests demonstrate the positive impact we can make when the community members take a stand.”

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<sup>1</sup>An Indictment or Information is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

“The FBI is proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Allentown Police Department and the Lehigh County DA in this investigation today,” said Venizelos. “These types of joint investigations are intended to not only rid our communities of those criminal predators that destroy the very fabric of safety and security that all law-abiding citizens expect and deserve, but also to send the clear message that lawlessness will not be allowed to rule our streets as we continue to work together to aggressively address drug and violent crime problems in the Lehigh Valley.”

“When one agency does an investigation that takes drugs and dealers off the streets, it has an impact,” said District Attorney Martin. “But when numerous agencies work together, as they did in this case, it has a significant impact and can help to restore an entire neighborhood. The law-abiding citizens who live in the areas targeted in this morning’s investigations have their neighborhood back. I want to thank U.S. Attorney Zane D. Memeger, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Lehigh County Drug Task Force detectives, the Lehigh County Municipal Emergency Response Team, the Pennsylvania State Police and their Emergency Response Team, the Allentown Police Department and its Emergency Response Team and Bethlehem and Easton Police Departments, all of whom were either involved in this lengthy investigation or assisted in the execution of the search warrants.”

The individual charges include several counts of distribution of 28 grams or more of cocaine base (crack), distribution of crack within 1,000 feet of a school, possession with intent to distribute, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and possession and sale of a stolen firearm. The defendants are facing prison terms that range from 20 years to life if convicted and almost all are facing mandatory minimum sentences.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Lehigh Valley Violent Gang Task Force, the Allentown Police Department, the Pennsylvania State Police, the Lehigh County District Attorney’s Office. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Sherri Stephan.

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