



ATF News

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For Immediate Release
www.atf.gov
Sept. 18, 2007

GEORGIA GUN INVESTIGATION GARNERS NATIONAL AWARD

Exemplary Partnerships Credited for Making Neighborhoods Safer

ATLANTA—A team of Georgia-based investigators received national recognition today during the national Project Safe Neighborhoods conference in Atlanta for the recent success of a long-term case and its significant impact on crime in a particularly troubled Georgia neighborhood.

The team, composed of federal prosecutors, agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), and the Chatham-Savannah Counter Narcotics Team (CNT), was on hand to accept the 2007 award for PSN's Outstanding Gun Crime Investigation dubbed "Operation Fire and Ice."

"The multi-agency cooperation in this case can be described as nothing short of seamless," said ATF Special Agent in Charge Vanessa McLemore. "By dismantling this violent criminal enterprise, the U.S. Attorney's Office, ATF agents and the CNT lend true testament to partnership and putting words into action. The magnitude of this action may have garnered a national award for the team, but it is the citizens who now live in a safe neighborhood and, who are the real winners."

The case, resulting in large seizures of firearms and drugs, sent a dozen defendants to federal prison with sentences of up to 20 years.

"This case is another excellent example of different agencies combining their unique resources for a common good," said Roy Harris, CNT commander. "In this case, the aim was to remove weapons from the hands of violent drug dealers, and at the same time, remove these dealers from our streets.

"Project Safe Neighborhoods was designed to do exactly what occurred in this joint criminal investigation. The investigators targeted violent criminals at the community level. Anytime you can add federal assets to address local crime problems, you improve

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the chances for significant results. I am proud that CNT was able to contribute and assist ATF in such an investigation, and look forward to working with them in the future.”

Prior to presenting this and other PSN Achievement Awards, Acting Deputy Attorney General Craig S. Morford spoke to more than 1,000 federal, state and local prosecutors, law enforcement officials, community leaders and other members of PSN teams from across the country who had convened to discuss efforts to reduce and prosecute gun crime.

The “Fire and Ice” participants were selected for the award following a nomination from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Georgia. The nomination states that the case exemplified “complete federal/state agency cooperation and pooling of intelligence and resources” that resulted in “the virtually, complete disruption of a significant local crime organization.” Although all of the violations occurred in Georgia’s southern, federal judicial district, the organization’s gun and drug networks spanned across the state, to include the Atlanta-metro area.

In October of 2004, ATF agents initiated an investigation of a previously convicted felon arrested by local law enforcement officers. The felon provided information regarding pervasive criminal activity by a collection of various members of the Hodges family and their associates, informally known as the “Hodges Organization.” Many of the suspects had previous, violent felony convictions and were reportedly involved in the illegal possession, use, and sale of firearms, as well as in the distribution of cocaine, and the manufacturing, use, and distribution of methamphetamine. The organization was based in a low income/high crime area in rural Chatham County known as Ogeechee Farms.

ATF special agents conferred with CNT agents, who had already developed substantial intelligence about the group. The felon was registered as a confidential informant and a full-scale, joint investigation was underway. Under the direction of the agents, the informant began purchasing firearms and drugs from multiple suspects. Several months later, the informant successfully introduced undercover agents to their targets. For the next 13 months, agents completely infiltrated the group, conducting approximately 30 undercover purchases of pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns, crystal methamphetamine, powder cocaine, and crack cocaine from the Hodges and their associates.

In January of 2005, agents seized two gun safes containing 37 firearms, including a machine gun from an organization member, a prohibited person with eight prior felony convictions. The next month, ATF recovered 95 pounds of marijuana from the property of the same man. In March of 2006, the final undercover transaction occurred and sealed

indictments were handed down by a federal grand jury. Every significant member of the organization was then arrested.

After the case broke, the close-knit nature of “The Farms” led to talk among some its members of the community about the informant’s identity, and rumors of death threats abounded. Once his identity was revealed during discovery, threats against him proliferated, ultimately resulting in the arrest and conviction of an additional defendant charged with attempting to retaliate against a witness.

This case resulted in the seizure of 59 firearms, 293.5 grams of cocaine powder, 111 grams of crack cocaine, 245.4 grams of methamphetamine, 95 pounds of marijuana, and 64 pills of Oxycontin. Many of the firearms were short-barreled or “sawed-off” shotguns. Twelve defendants were ultimately convicted in federal court, receiving lengthy prison sentences without parole.

Founded in 2001, PSN is the nation’s largest and most visible effort to combat violent crime and criminal gang activity at the community level. It helps to create safer communities through heightened coordination and cooperation among federal, state, and local law enforcement and the community.

Media kits containing audio/visual materials relative to the investigation and “Fire and Ice” agency representatives are available for interview in both Atlanta and Savannah. More information about PSN can be found at www.psn.gov <<http://www.psn.gov/>>.

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