



Department of Justice

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**INDOOR MARIJUANA “GROW HOUSES,” OVER TWO DOZEN
DEFENDANTS TAKEN DOWN WITH FEDERAL INDICTMENT AFTER
LOCAL & STATE ACTIONS**

Atlanta, GA—A total of 25 defendants have been charged in a federal indictment, unsealed today in Atlanta, in connection with a large number of indoor marijuana growing operations in a coordinated law enforcement action known as “Hooked On ‘Ponics.” The defendants charged are:

MERQUIADES MARTINEZ, 36, of Fayetteville, Georgia; BLANCA BOTELLO, 35, of Fayetteville, Georgia; JUAN CARLOS MARTIN-LOPEZ, 38, of Loganville, Georgia; GERSON CARRANZA, 26, of Monroe, Georgia; RAMON AGUILA-RAMOS, 41, of Miami, Florida; STANLEY CASTILLO, 41, of Miami, Florida; YOSVEL RUBIO, 31, of West Palm Beach, Florida; ZULIA DIAZ, 31, of West Palm Beach, Florida; NESTOR RAPHAEL GARCIA-JIMINEZ, 36, of Fayetteville, Georgia; LUIS GUARRO-PONCE, 38, of McDonough, Georgia; JUAN GUEVARRA-MILIAN, 37, of Hialeah, Florida; FRANCISCO HERNANDEZ, 46, of Miami, Florida; ADALBERTO HERNANDEZ-CRUZ, 32, of Covington, Georgia; CARLOS HURTADO O’CAMPO, 42, of West Palm Beach, Florida; REINALDO VICTOR PARDO, 61, of Homestead, Florida; FRESNIO JORGE PEREZ, 54, of Conyers, Georgia; EDUARDO REY, 34, of Miami, Florida; JESUS ALEMAN RUBIO, 56, of Lehigh Acres, Florida; MARIO RUBIO, 36, of Hialeah, Florida; KENIA SANCHEZ-REYNALDO, 30, of Hialeah, Florida; WENCESLAO SANTIESTEBAN, 44, of Hialeah, Florida; JESUS SOTO-BAEZ, 31, of Miami, Florida; JOSE RAMON VALDIVIA, 59, of Moreland, Georgia; DADYANES VALENZUELA-GONZOLO, 27, of West Palm Beach, Florida; and TOMAS VALIENTE, 41, from Hialeah, Florida.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias noted in a statement, “The name for this joint investigation, Hooked On ‘Ponics, refers to a complex and sophisticated string of hydroponic marijuana grow houses--enough to fill a large subdivision--complete with a way of siphoning off large amounts of electricity so authorities couldn’t easily tell that they were grow houses. The houses were scattered around the Atlanta metro area. This is as complex

a scheme as we have ever seen in Georgia when it comes to mass growth of indoor, hydroponic marijuana. What the defendants didn't count on is dozens of law enforcement agencies and prosecutors quickly coming together to unplug the operation—for good. We commend the fine, cooperative work of the many law enforcement and prosecution agencies involved in this operation.”

At a news conference this morning outside the Richard Russell Federal Building in Atlanta, Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division stated, “The hard work and dedication of a multitude of federal, state and local counterparts uncovered this masterful, yet underhanded scheme. The defendants in this case made trickery and deceit commonplace. They not only trafficked in copious quantities of high-grade pot, they stole immeasurable amounts of power to support their illegal operations. I am proud to say that through hard work and dedication, we have pulled the plug on this once-thriving criminal network.”

Jack Killorin, Director of the Atlanta HIDTA said, “This investigation involved more than the production of very high potency marijuana. This was a sophisticated criminal operation hidden in middle class neighborhoods, creating a physical and environmental hazard to the community.”

Fayette County Sheriff Randall Johnson said, “This was an extensive investigation that proved when law enforcement agencies work as one team—success is sure to follow. We are very grateful for all the support received from all the agencies involved.”

Henry County Police Chief Russell Abernathy said, "I would like to commend all of the agencies involved for the hard work put into this complex investigation. I truly believe that the tremendous success in this case was due largely to the outstanding interagency cooperation that I saw throughout the investigation."

Walton County Sheriff Joe Chapman said, “We have never been involved in such a widespread operation as this. I am amazed at how well so many different agencies and jurisdictions successfully worked together on this. This is a win for the ‘Good Guys.’”

According to Nahmias, the federal indictment, and prior state court documents, to date, law enforcement has dismantled 44 active marijuana grow houses in a 14 county area. They have seized 8,638 marijuana plants and 2,279 pounds of processed marijuana. The defendants indicted had varying responsibilities in the manufacture of marijuana conspiracy alleged. MARTINEZ and MARTIN allegedly had managerial roles, while BOTELLO and CARRANZA, who were real estate agents, were allegedly responsible for obtaining the residences converted to grow houses. BOTELLO also owned a hydroponics business that was allegedly used to purchase and distribute equipment for the grow houses. The remaining defendants were allegedly involved in the conspiracy through grow house and/or vehicle ownership and/or participation in the manufacturing

and cultivation process. Many of the defendants are related by blood or marriage. Officials at this morning's news conference said that the investigation is ongoing, and so they could not discuss all details of the alleged conspiracy. Defendants have begun the process of making their initial appearances this week before a United States Magistrate Judge. All of the defendants are charged with Conspiracy to Manufacture at least 1000 marijuana plants.

Also facing substantive charges for Possession with Intent to Distribute at least 100 marijuana plants are:

M. MARTINEZ, BOTELLO, CASTILLO, GARCIA-Jiminez, GUARRO-Ponce, GUEVARRA-Milian, A. HERNANDEZ-Cruz, REY, SANCHEZ-Reynaldo, SANTIESTEBAN, VALDIVIA, VALENZUELA-Gonzolo and VALIENTE

Also facing charges of Possession of Equipment, Chemicals, Materials and Products to Manufacture Marijuana are:

M. MARTINEZ, BOTELLO, MARTIN-Lopez, CARRANZA, CASTILLO, GARCIA-Jiminez, GUARRO-Ponce, GUEVARRA-Milian, F. HERNANDEZ, A. HERNANDEZ-Cruz, PEREZ, J. RUBIO, SANCHEZ-Reynaldo, SANTIESTEBAN, SOTO-Baez, VALDIVIA and VALIENTE.

Also facing charges of Management and Control of a Premises to Manufacture and Store Marijuana are:

M. MARTINEZ, BOTELLO, MARTIN-Lopez, CARRANZA, CASTILLO, GARCIA-Jiminez, GUARRO-Ponce, GUEVARRA-Milian, F. HERNANCEZ, A. HERNANDEZ-Cruz, PEREZ, J. RUBIO, SANCHEZ-Reynaldo, SANTIESTEBAN, VALDIVIA and VALENZUELA-Gonzolo.

According to the indictment, the Management and Control of a Premises to Manufacture and Store Marijuana charges relate to the following residential properties:

- 440 Ellistown Road, Jackson, Georgia
- 2602 Abbey Ridge Road, Conyers, Georgia
- 300 Haynie Road, Moreland, Georgia
- 607 Raleigh Court, Winder, Georgia
- 100 Ashlyn Ridge Drive, McDonough, Georgia
- 165 North Bethany Road, McDonough, Georgia
- 483 Plantation Drive, McDonough, Georgia
- 50 Havenwood Court, Covington, Georgia
- 370 Parker Road, Covington, Georgia
- 4000 Hollow Springs Trail, Loganville, Georgia

This investigation, which was initiated by the Fayette County Sheriff's Office Drug Task Force, is being coordinated through the Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force. The agencies participating in the investigation

are the Drug Enforcement Administration, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, Barrow County Sheriff's Office, Butts County Sheriff's Office, Coweta County Sheriff's Office, East Metro Drug Enforcement, Forsyth County Sheriff's Department, Gainesville Police Department, Georgia State Patrol, Gwinnett County Drug Task Force, Hall County Gang Task Force, Hall County Sheriff's Office/MANNS Unit, Henry County Police Department, Henry County Sheriff's Department, Hialeah (Florida) Police Department Narcotics, Jackson County Sheriff's Office, Jasper County Sheriff's Office, Jones County Sheriff's Office, Newton County Sheriff's Office, Rockdale County Sheriff's Office, Walton County Sheriff's Office, and the District Attorneys' Offices for the Alcovy Judicial Circuit, Coweta Judicial Circuit, Gwinnett County Judicial Circuit, Griffin Judicial Circuit, Northeastern Judicial Circuit, Piedmont Judicial Circuit, Ocmulgee Judicial Circuit, Rockdale Judicial Circuit and Towaliga Judicial Circuit.

Assistant United States Attorney Lisa W. Tarvin and Special Assistant United States Attorney Cassandra Schansman are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.