



# Department of Justice

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## **HUGE METH SEIZURE SHATTERS GEORGIA RECORD** **SET JUST TWO WEEKS AGO**

### *Two Defendants Arrested; Two More Are Fugitives*

ATLANTA, GA.— Federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities in North Georgia today announced the record seizure of approximately 341 pounds of suspected crystal methamphetamine (“ice”) in Gainesville, Georgia, on August 21 and 22, 2006. A federal criminal complaint has been filed against three brothers, ALEJANDRO MARTINEZ-MENERA, 23, SOCORRO MARTINEZ-MENERA, 25, and SACARIAS MARTINEZ-MENERA, 21, charging them with possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine. The three and a fourth defendant, ARNULFO PINEDA-RIVERA, 32, are also charged with growing a large number of marijuana plants, and PINEDA-RIVERA is also charged with being an illegal alien who re-entered the United States after being deported. All four defendants resided in Gainesville.

ALEJANDRO MARTINEZ-MENERA and ARNULFO PINEDA-RIVERA have been arrested and made their initial appearance in federal court yesterday. SOCORRO and SACARIAS MARTINEZ-MENERA are considered fugitives.

“Each record meth seizure we make is an unfortunate reminder that North Georgia has become a central hub for the meth epidemic that is afflicting not just our communities but much of the nation,” said United States Attorney David E. Nahmias, noting that a separate seizure of 187 pounds of ice was made just two weeks ago in Buford, Georgia. “The only good news is that through close cooperation and hard work by our law enforcement agencies, we are seizing more and more drugs and putting more and more drug dealers behind bars where they belong. Our hope is that they will get the message that they don’t want to operate here in Georgia.”

“We want to recognize the important cooperative effort that took place during this investigation and seizure of evidence,” noted Russ Arthur, Supervisory Special Agent with the U.S. Forest Service in Atlanta, Georgia. “Through the assistance of the Union County Sheriff’s Office, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Gainesville Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, Hall County Sheriff’s Office and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, we have removed an incredible amount of suspected crystal methamphetamine from the streets,” Arthur said. “The Forest Service has limited investigative resources, so without this team effort with all the agencies involved, this

significant drug seizure would not have happened. While the USDA Forest Service is not normally a lead agency in investigations involving such a large amount of drugs, our officers do deal with a multitude of crimes faced in the metropolitan areas. We are grateful for the efforts of this multi-agency effort in this investigation.”

The seizure of approximately 341 pounds of suspected crystal methamphetamine from a residence in Gainesville, Georgia was the result of a three-month, multi-agency investigation. The investigation, which originated in the Chattahoochee National Forest with the discovery of a large marijuana field, was led by the USDA Forest Service and involved the Union County Sheriff’s Department and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The investigation began on June 29, 2006, when a helicopter pilot flying for the Governor’s Drug Task Force spotted marijuana plants growing cultivated on Chattahoochee National Forest land in Union County. The U.S. Forest Service, Union County Sheriff’s Office and ATF began a joint investigation to determine who was cultivating these illegal plants. Through surveillance and other investigative techniques, agents were able to determine that four individuals living in Hall County, Georgia, were tending the marijuana plants.

According to Nahmias and the criminal complaints filed in the case: The marijuana cultivation site on which approximately 300 marijuana plants had originally been planted was located off of Forest Route 39, Duncan Ridge Road, on Chattahoochee National Forest Service property in Union County. Subsequent human and electronic surveillance allegedly identified ALEJANDRO MARTINEZ-MENERA, SOCORRO MARTINEZ-MENERA, SACARIAS MARTINEZ-MENERA and ARNULFO PINEDA-RIVERA cultivating the marijuana.

Further investigation allegedly showed that ALEJANDRO MARTINEZ-MANERA and his brothers were also operating out of a home at 2416 Crossgate Court in Gainesville. On August 21, 2006, agents of the U.S. Forest Service, ATF, FBI, the Union County Sheriff’s Office and the Hall County Major Offender’s Task Force executed a federal search warrant at that residence; they obtained a second search warrant for the residence the following day. Agents found a large quantity of methamphetamine and processed marijuana leaves in the garage and in a closet inside the house. Some of the methamphetamine (41 packages) was located in a closet inside a gray cooler. Agents also located a 9mm semi-automatic Baretta pistol in a closet. In drawers in the kitchen, agents located two sets of digital scales and three different packages of a cutting agent.

Agents saw freshly disturbed dirt in a number of areas of the backyard, as well as shovels with fresh dirt on them. While digging down into one site, agents located a piece of wood which was covering a gray cooler with a white lid, with gray duct tape running the entire circumference of the cooler. After a second search warrant was issued, agents opened the cooler and discovered 41 packages of methamphetamine. The agents discovered a second

buried cooler which contained an additional 17 packages. The methamphetamine appears to be uncut crystal meth, or “ice.” In all, an estimated 341 pounds of ice were found.

At a news conference this morning at ATF-Atlanta, law enforcement officials said that this was the largest meth seizure in Georgia history. The suspected crystal methamphetamine in uncut form has a minimum estimated street value of \$17 million, and depending on how many times it is “cut,” DEA estimates that the street value could be over \$50 million.

Two of the defendants, SOCORRO MARTINEZ-MENERA, and his brother SACARIAS MARTINEZ-MENERA, have not yet been arrested and are considered fugitives. Law enforcement is asking anyone with information to call any of the federal, state or local agencies involved in this investigation. (NEWS MEDIA NOTE: photos of the fugitives are available and are electronically attached.) The investigation is continuing.

At the news conference, ATF Special Agent In Charge Vanessa McLemore said of the case, “The identification of four defendants and the recovery of this massive amount of meth by the US Forest Service, ATF and the Union County Sheriff’s Department is a tribute to the force behind law enforcement team work and dedication to mission. The criminal element needs to take note that all Georgia law enforcement, federal, state and local, is stepping up to investigate and dismantle illegal drug and firearms organizations.”

Members of the public are reminded that the criminal complaint contains only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case is being investigated by the U.S. Forest Service, along with the Union County Sheriff’s Office and the ATF. Additional valuable assistance in this case is being provided by the DEA, the Georgia Governor’s Drug Task Force, the Gainesville Police Department, the FBI and the Hall County Sheriff’s Office.

Assistant United States Attorney Allen Moye is 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](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan).