



Department of Justice

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LEAD DEFENDANT SENTENCED IN LARGEST ECSTASY RING IN S.E.

Kennesaw Man and 18 More Defendants Involved In 1.5 Million Ecstasy Tabs

Atlanta, GA -STEPHEN ASHLEY HOUSE, 35, of Kennesaw, Georgia, the principal organizer and leader of the largest ecstasy importation and distribution ring busted in the Southeastern United States, was sentenced today by United States District Judge Thomas W. Thrash to a term in federal prison of 17 years to be followed by 3 years supervised release. House and 18 other defendants were prosecuted as part of a federal investigation code named "Operation X-Men," which led investigators on an international trail of ecstasy smuggling through the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, and Denmark.

"This group of drug dealers preyed on a particularly vulnerable group, high school and college students and other young people who do not appreciate how truly dangerous club drugs like ecstasy can be," said David E. Nahmias, United States Attorney.

According to Nahmias and the documents and evidence presented in court: HOUSE's organization imported more than 1.5 million ecstasy tablets into Atlanta from Amsterdam starting in 1997 and ending in 2001. The evidence showed the ecstasy tablets initially were smuggled into the United States from Amsterdam by "body-couriers," who strapped vacuum-sealed bags of tablets to their bodies and took international flights home from cities such as Dusseldorf, Germany.

After several couriers were arrested arriving in the United States, the organization used Russian shipping contacts to hide the tablets on large container ships sailing to Canada. The tablets were stashed inside houses and storage units in Montreal until couriers arrived and drove the tablets to Atlanta hidden in spare tire compartments and gasoline tanks, court records show. In January 2000, one of these couriers was arrested in Florida, leading to the seizure of 24 kilograms of ecstasy tablets in the attic of a "stash house" in Brossard, Canada. The street value of the pills seized from this residence is approximately \$2 million.

The evidence also showed the organization imported tablets by hiding them inside furniture shipped to Atlanta from Copenhagen, Denmark. After the organization imported

ecstasy tablets into Atlanta, the tablets then were repackaged and handed off to a network of middle-level distributors, many of whom have been charged and sentenced in the case. Witnesses told investigators that the ecstasy imported by this organization was resold to distributors and customers throughout Georgia and in Tennessee, South Carolina, Florida, and Alabama.

The evidence showed that the organization benefitted from a surge in the popularity of ecstasy among club-going young adults in the late 1990's. The surge in ecstasy use coincided with a growth in the popularity of rave parties and dance clubs in Atlanta and across the United States. Prosecutors have estimated that this organization made \$12 million in profits during the years it operated. Indeed, House earned the nickname "Captain America" among ecstasy distributors in Amsterdam for his ability to import such large quantities of tablets without being arrested.

HOUSE was arrested in January 2003 in Malaga, Spain, where he hid from law enforcement in a small coastal town on the Mediterranean Sea. House was arrested in the company of another co-defendant in the case, RAFAEL IBRAGIMOV, 32, who was a Russian citizen living in Atlanta.

Judge Thrash earlier sentenced two other leaders of the ecstasy organization, RONNIE LOGGINS, 36, of Riverdale, Georgia, to 20 years in prison, and BEN VASSEGGHI, 30, of Marietta, Georgia, to 20 years in prison. Another defendant, MIKE CARDIN, 37, of Rex, Georgia, was sentenced to 25 years in prison after Judge Thrash found that CARDIN had surreptitiously planted ecstasy tablets and a pistol in the home of a witness who was expected to testify against him at trial. CARDIN then fled to Mexico, where he was using an alias when he was arrested and extradited to the United States.

Two defendants remain charged in the case: CAMMIRON VON ODOM, 35, from Opp, Alabama, is being sought as a fugitive, and MARCO OLYVES, 39, from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, is a Dutch citizen awaiting extradition from India to face the charges in Atlanta.

Other defendants already sentenced in the case include:

JERRY HAYWOOD, 35, of Acworth, Georgia, 20 years in prison; JEFFREY STONE, 37, of Riverdale, Georgia, 17 years, 6 months in prison; JOHN DUNLAP, 33, Georgia, 12 years, 7 months in prison; GABOR HADJU, 29, of Marietta, Georgia, 9 years, 6 months in prison; KEL MUNROE, 38, of Fayetteville, Georgia, 8 years, 1 month in prison; SAL DeANGELO, 41, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 years, 3 months in prison; BRENT BRESSNER, 29, of Powder Springs, Georgia, 6 years in prison; PHILLIP EDWARDS, 33, of Atlanta, Georgia, 5 years, 10 months in prison; RAFAEL IBRAGIMOV, 32, of Atlanta, Georgia, 4 years, 4 months in prison; CHUCK McMURTRY, 36, of Baldwin, Georgia, 3 years, 1 month

in prison; BRANT CONLEY, 33, of Marietta, Georgia, 3 years, 1 month in prison; and JOHN TURNER, 29, of Atlanta, Georgia, 2 years, 6 months in prison.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta recommends parents and children learn about the dangers of drugs at the following web site: www.justthinktwice.com.

The case is being investigated through a joint effort by the Drug Enforcement Administration; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation; Henry County Sheriff's Department; Henry County Police; Marietta-Cobb-Smyrna Drug Task Force; and the Doraville Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorney John Horn is prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney or F. Gentry Shelnett, Chief, Criminal Division, 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 <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan/>.