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ROCKFORD MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO CRACK COCAINE AND FIREARM CHARGES

ROCKFORD -- PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; ANDREW L. TRAVER, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; PHILIP J. NICOLOSI, Winnebago County State's Attorney; and RICHARD A. MEYERS, Winnebago County Sheriff, today made the following announcement:

HALSTON L. CARTER, 23, Rockford, Illinois, pled guilty today in federal court in Rockford to illegally possessing with intent to distribute 75.6 grams of cocaine base ("crack cocaine") and for illegally possessing a firearm on October 23, 2007.

In pleading guilty, Carter admitted that on October 23, 2007, he was at his residence when law enforcement officers executed a search warrant. Carter admitted that when the officers entered the residence he ran down the basement stairs and threw a bag on the floor of the basement containing approximately 42.7 grams of crack cocaine. According to the plea agreement, when officers apprehended Carter and placed him in handcuffs, they located a plastic bag in Carter's back pants pocket containing approximately 24.1 grams of crack as well as \$535 in his front pants pocket. The officers also located and seized another 8.8 grams of crack cocaine on the kitchen counter. Further, at the time of Carter's arrest, Carter agreed to allow officers to search two vehicles parked outside his residence. Officers seized a camera bag from the trunk of one vehicle containing 495 grams of cocaine in a plastic bag, as well as a loaded .45 caliber semi-automatic handgun. Officers also located \$329 in cash from the center console of the second vehicle. Carter admitted in his plea agreement that he intended to sell the crack cocaine and cocaine to other individuals. Carter also admitted that prior to October 23, 2007, he had been convicted of a felony offense and that the firearm and ammunition had previously been transported in interstate commerce. Carter has been in custody since his arrest on October 23, 2007.

Sentencing for Carter is scheduled for November 10, 2008, at 9:00 a.m. Carter faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in prison and a maximum potential sentence of life imprisonment, a maximum fine of up to \$4,000,000, and a term of supervised release following his release from prison of at least five years and up to life on the drug charge. Carter also faces a maximum term of 10 years' imprisonment for possessing a firearm as a convicted felon, as well as a maximum fine of \$250,000 and up to three years of supervised release. The actual sentence will be determined by a United States District Court Judge, guided by the United States Sentencing Guidelines.

First charged by the Winnebago County States Attorney's Office under state law, Carter was transferred to federal court where he was charged under tough federal firearms laws as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an intensive, cooperative effort between local, state, and federal law enforcement to attack gun crimes. The cornerstone of the program is that every state defendant with a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution in order to obtain the harshest penalties for the worst offenders. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov.

The case was investigated by the Rockford Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, and the Winnebago County Sheriff's Police Metro Narcotics Unit. The case is being prosecuted in federal court by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph C. Pedersen.

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