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RESTAURANT OWNER ENTERS PLEA TO
TAX CHARGES AND FORFEITS ONE MILLION

Augusta, GA: Edmund A. Booth, Jr, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, announced today that Emilio Sanchez, owner of Vera Cruz Mexican Restaurants in Augusta, entered a guilty plea in United States District Court in Augusta Ga. to three counts of filing false tax returns in violation of Title 26 United States Code Section 7206(1). Additionally, Sanchez agreed to forfeit in excess of one million dollars, a portion of which will be used to pay back taxes and fines, and the remainder of which will be shared with local and federal law enforcement agencies to be used for law enforcement purposes.

At the Rule 11 hearing held today, the evidence established that in December 2004, Vera Cruz Mexican Restaurant on Stevens Creek Road was burglarized and a safe was taken. The safe contained just over \$400,000 of the \$1,000,000 that was ultimately seized. The burglary investigation led officers to secure search warrants, which turned up the remaining \$600,000. During the Rule 11 hearing, agents testified about the seized cash and that Sanchez had under-reported his taxable income for the years 2001, 2002, and 2003 by more than \$460,000.

The maximum statutory penalty for each count of filing a false tax return is not more than three (3) years imprisonment, and a fine of not more than \$100,000. A sentencing date will be scheduled following completion of a pre-sentence investigation and report.

The investigation was conducted by the Richmond County Sheriff's Office, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Internal Revenue Service. The Government is represented by Patricia Green Johnson, and James L. Coursey, Jr., Assistant United States Attorneys for the Southern District of Georgia.

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