



Department of Justice

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias
Northern District of Georgia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

06/03/08

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan/>

CONTACT: Patrick Crosby

(404)581-6016

FAX (404)581-6160

DEFENDANTS SENTENCED TO MULTIPLE LIFE PRISON TERMS IN ROME RACKETEERING CASE

Court Completes First Round of Sentencings of Violent Cedartown Gang

Rome, GA - DANIEL VILLENAS-REYES, 36, of Cedartown, Georgia, was sentenced to life in prison plus 160 years, and HOUSTON SHANE ROSSER, 36, of Centre, Alabama, was sentenced to life plus 50 years, as a federal district court completed the sentencing of the first 23 of a total of 30 defendants who were convicted earlier this year of crimes ranging from murder to racketeering, methamphetamine trafficking, and firearms offenses. The case arose from a multi-agency investigation into methamphetamine trafficking and related violence in Polk and Floyd counties between 2000 and 2006.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said of the sentencings in this case, "The terribly dangerous character of this drug gang, which operated out of the small town of Cedartown, Georgia, is demonstrated by the fact that the racketeering convictions were based upon numerous violent crimes including five murders, attempted murder, and kidnaping, as well as drug trafficking. The five murders for which defendants Villenas-reyes and Shane Rosser were convicted were 50% of all murders in Floyd and Polk counties in 2003." Nahmias added, "The sentences imposed properly ensure that the most dangerous gang members will never be free again to terrorize their communities. This case also illustrates the use of federal racketeering and drug statutes to dismantle an entire criminal organization, especially a group like this one that operated across local and state jurisdictional lines. Our successful prosecution resulted from the excellent combined investigative efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Such partnerships are essential to our continued efforts to protect our communities from drugs and violence."

Federal Bureau of Investigation Atlanta Special Agent in Charge Greg Jones said of the case results, “The sentences are the culmination of an extensive joint law enforcement effort that dealt with one of the most egregious criminal cases seen in this area. The lengthy sentences handed down to these defendants represent that fact. The quick FBI and ICE partnership with the GBI, Floyd County Police Department, Polk County Sheriff’s Office, and the Polk County Police Department in investigating and apprehending these violent criminals was critical in this successful outcome.”

Kenneth Smith, Special Agent in Charge of Immigration and Custom Enforcement’s (ICE) Office of Investigations in Atlanta said, “This began as a homicide investigation with ties to prostitution and led to the discovery of a complex drug distribution organization involved in other heinous acts. Area law enforcement officers showed their commitment to stopping this criminal enterprise by coming together in a task force that will continue to work to prevent others from terrorizing the community.”

Georgia Bureau of Investigation Director Vernon Keenan said, “The sentences these individuals received are indicative of the extremely violent nature of this gang. The cooperation among local, state and federal law enforcement agencies in this effort was outstanding and was paramount to the successful conclusion of this case. The GBI's priority is assisting local agencies in smaller communities across Georgia in addressing the violent crime problem and, with that priority in mind, we are pleased with the outcome.”

Evidence presented during the trial in January and February proved that the defendants’ racketeering enterprise trafficked methamphetamine and protected its territory, enforced discipline among members, and collected debts through a pattern of racketeering activities that included the murders of five people, attempted murder, aggravated assault, kidnaping, transporting and harboring illegal aliens, drug trafficking, and arson. The grand jury indicted 30 defendants in the case in July 2005, and most of them eventually entered guilty pleas. Six defendants went to trial earlier this year, and the jury convicted them on February 25, 2008. The district court began sentencing all of the defendants May 19, 2008, and completed the sentencing of 24 yesterday. The remaining defendants are tentatively scheduled to be sentenced in June or July.

DANIEL VILLENAS-REYES was sentenced to five life sentences, to be served concurrently, plus 160 years to follow. There is no parole in the federal criminal system. VILLENAS-REYES was convicted of shooting and killing Cesar Juarez Vasquez, Arturo Torrez Ventura, and a woman who has never been identified, in a house at 506 7th Street, Cedartown, on September 16, 2003, and setting their bodies and the house on fire to hide the evidence of the murders. Trial evidence showed that VILLENAS-REYES committed the murders execution-style by binding the victims with duct tape, then shooting them in the head, after residents of the house refused to pay him for highly diluted methamphetamine that he had supplied them. VILLENAS-REYES was also convicted of

participating in the shooting of Jesse Vargas in Rome on December 17, 2002, in which Vargas survived being shot eight times in his torso with a .40 caliber pistol, kidnaping, several counts of selling methamphetamine, and several counts of using firearms in connection with crimes of violence and drug trafficking offenses.

In sentencing VILLENAS-REYES, Judge Harold L. Murphy said that the triple murder in Cedartown was “one of the most heinous crimes” that he has ever seen in his long career as a lawyer, a state trial judge, and a federal district judge. “The facts of this case showed a most detestable murder of three people in a callous and inhumane manner, that was part of the defendant’s trading in drugs without any regard for the law,” Judge Murphy said from the bench.

The court sentenced HOUSTON SHANE ROSSER to four life sentences, to be served concurrently, plus 50 years. In addition to the racketeering and drug trafficking offenses, the jury convicted ROSSER of shooting and killing T.J. Agan and Christopher Fortenberry in their home in southern Floyd County on March 27, 2003. Evidence at trial showed that ROSSER went to Agan’s home to collect a drug debt, and he entered the trailer with JOSH DARRELL SMITH and a young woman. ROSSER shot Agan in the head with a 20-gauge shotgun, and then he killed Fortenberry, Agan’s roommate, in the same manner after Smith refused to follow ROSSER’s orders to eliminate Fortenberry as a witness. JOSH DARRELL SMITH went to trial with the other five defendants in January. But he pleaded guilty midway through the trial and testified against ROSSER, as did the young woman. Judge Murphy found that the sentence of life plus 50 years was fair and reasonable, in light of the fact that ROSSER committed two execution-style murders with a shotgun in a matter of moments.

On May 19, 2008, the court sentenced MARCO ANTONIO CORDERO, 33, of Cedartown, to prison for life plus 60 years. In addition to the racketeering and drug trafficking crimes, the jury convicted CORDERO of pistol-whipping a victim whom CORDERO suspected of stealing 30 pounds of methamphetamine from him. CORDERO was also convicted of selling methamphetamine while he was escaped from the Polk County Jail in the winter of 2003, and being a convicted felon and an illegal alien who possessed several firearms on different occasions while he was a fugitive. (Other trial evidence also showed that CORDERO, VILLENAS-REYES and SAMMY DUQUE-VERGARA were previously deported to their native country of Mexico before and during the operation of their criminal enterprise, but illegally re-entered the United States.)

SAMMY DUQUE-VERGARA, 33, and his brother, JUAN DUQUE-VERGARA, 32, both of Cedartown, were also convicted of racketeering, selling methamphetamine, and JUAN DUQUE-VERGARA was convicted of participating with CORDERO in the pistol-whipping of an innocent victim and using a firearm to commit that crime of violence. The court sentenced SAMMY DUQUE-VERGARA to 27 years imprisonment, and JUAN DUQUE-VERGARA to 17 years and three months, with deportation to

follow.

Seventeen other defendants pleaded guilty to participating in the racketeering conspiracy and the court sentenced them to prison as follows between May 19 and 23, 2008:

- TIMOTHY BLAINE STROUP, 42, of Cedartown, was sentenced to 11 years and six months;
- CHRIS SORRELLS, 35, of Cedartown, was sentenced to 11 years and four months;
- MIGUEL GOICOCHEA-PEREZ, 25, of Cedartown, was sentenced to nine years;
- MARICELLA MARTINEZ-RICO, 30, of Cartersville, was sentenced to nine years;
- MISTY RAE McCRAY, 27, of Buchanan, was sentenced to nine years;
- TERRY EDWARD FOLSOM, 49, of Cedartown, was sentenced to seven years and nine months;
- DANA STEPHANIE CRIDER, 28, of Cedartown, was sentenced to seven years and six months;
- KATHY DARLENE YORK, 47, of Cedartown, was sentenced to five years and six months;
- STEPHEN LYNN BROWN, 32, of Cedartown, was sentenced to five years and three months;
- RANDY WESSON THOMPSON, JR., 33, of Cedartown, was sentenced to four years and nine months;
- BRANDEE JANE KINES, 32, of Rome, was sentenced to four years and nine months;
- LARRY DONALD WHEELER, 51, of Cedartown, was sentenced to three years and six months;
- JAMES REX WILSON, 49, of Cedartown, was sentenced to three years and five months;
- TIMOTHY P. WATSON, 35, of Esom Hill, was sentenced to three years and one month;
- BOBBY JOE JOHNSON, 33, of Cedartown, was sentenced to two years and nine months;
- JAMES GARNER, 50, of Cedartown, was sentenced to two years and nine months; and
- LISA DARLENE WEAVER, 46, of Cedartown, was sentenced to two years.

JOSH DARRELL SMITH, 27, of Rome, pleaded guilty during the trial to racketeering and aiding and abetting ROSSER in the use of firearms to kill Agan and Fortenberry. On April 11, 2008, the court sentenced SMITH to prison for thirty years. FELIPE CARMONA-ROMERO will be sentenced June 20, 2008, while BILLY RAY

LACKEY, IVAN ANTONIO MOLINA and RICHARD GENE SHAW will be sentenced July 11, 2008.

The indictment also charged DAVID EDWARD CARTER, II, 35, of Cedartown, with participating in the drug trafficking conspiracy, but not any racketeering crimes. CARTER pleaded guilty and on May 27, 2008, the court sentenced him to prison for four years and three months.

Trial evidence showed that Polk County and Floyd County law enforcement agencies assisted each other in investigating the five murders when a witness came forward in January 2004 and explained how the killings were part of the violent operation of a single methamphetamine trafficking enterprise that operated out of Cedartown. The FBI and ICE then assembled a multi-agency task force that investigated the wide-sweeping enterprise and led to the prosecution of 30 enterprise members. FBI Special Agent Robert W. Meadows testified at trial that the investigation was unique in his experience because it was aimed not at ferreting out the source of the dealers' drugs, but stopping the killings, beatings, assaults, and other violent acts that the conspirators were perpetrating upon the people of Polk and Floyd counties.

This case was investigated by Special Agents of the FBI, ICE, and GBI along with the State Fire Marshal's Arson Unit, the Floyd County Police Department, the Polk County Sheriff's Office, the Polk County Police Department, and the Cedartown Police Department. The law enforcement agencies, along with ICE and GBI, participate in the "Northwest Georgia Criminal Enterprise Task Force," a FBI Safe Streets Task Force.

Assistant United States Attorneys Kim S. Dammers and William G. Traynor 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.