



NEWS RELEASE

Thomas P. O'Brien

United States Attorney
Central District of California

Thom Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer
(213) 894-6947
thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cac

For Immediate Distribution

October 15, 2008

JOINT LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATION LEADS TO ARREST OF NINE MEMBERS OF VIOLENT SANTA BARBARA STREET GANG

A joint federal-state law enforcement operation this morning led to the arrest of nine members of a Santa Barbara gang who are named in a federal racketeering indictment that alleges the gang has engaged in murder, attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, conspiracy to distribute narcotics, distribution of narcotics and robbery. This case represents the first racketeering case ever brought on the Central Coast.

The indictment charges a total of 28 defendants, including 19 under the Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. Several defendants are additionally charged with violent crimes in aid of racketeering, as well as distribution of heroin and distribution of cocaine, in the indictment returned last week by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles. In addition to the nine defendants arrested this morning, 17 defendants charged in the indictment are already in custody on state charges and are expected to be turned over to federal authorities. Authorities are continuing to search for two defendants.

"The federal racketeering case brought against the Eastside gangsters will go a long way towards protecting the citizens of Santa Barbara and the numerous visitors who come here every year," said United States Attorney Thomas P. O'Brien. "We will continue to work with our local law enforcement partners throughout this district to combat gang violence."

In addition to the federal RICO case, the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office is expected to charge 17 defendants in Superior Court. Immigration

authorities additionally arrested one person on suspicion of being an illegal alien.

The Eastside gang has claimed as its turf the area east of State Street in the central part of Santa Barbara. Broken into four sub-groups or "cliques," the gang is believed to be comprised of more than 150 members, some as young as 11.

The indictment alleges that members of the gang frequently engaged in "cruising," in which Eastside members armed themselves with an array of deadly weapons, including knives, baseball bats, and pipes, and drove in groups to Westside gang territory to attack members or associates of that gang.

Eastside rules required that members of the gang attack individuals who enter areas frequented by the gang, including individuals who might be in gang areas to shop in stores or eat at restaurants, according to the indictment, which also alleges that the gang was hostile to the presence of African-Americans in areas frequented by the gang. Eastside members intimidated, threatened and assaulted persons in areas they frequented as a means to control the people in those neighborhoods, including potential witnesses who might testify in court about their crimes.

The indictment alleges that the gang was responsible for the murders of two rival gang members last year. The indictment also alleges that gang members attempted to kill six other victims.

"ATF will continue to have a presence wherever gangsters have a presence," said John A. Torres, Special Agent in Charge of ATF's Los Angeles Field Division. "We will not allow them to victimize our neighborhoods through their criminal activities. As a team, federal and local law enforcement agencies are committed to making sure that gang members feel the impact of justice brought forth upon them."

Salvador Hernandez, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI in Los Angeles, stated: "The FBI has partnered with the City of Santa Barbara and the ATF to address the recent escalation of gang-associated violence in the city of Santa Barbara. The Eastside gang, like many others, pursues its criminal objectives through violent acts, including murder, robbery and assault. Taking the most violent criminals off the streets and sending them to prison for many years is a step toward restoring order in the communities in which they operate."

The indictment charges 19 defendants with participating in a conspiracy to violate the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, a count that alleges 205 overt acts related to the conspiracy. The indictment also names various defendants

in 13 counts of violent crime in aid of racketeering, one count of discharge of a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence, two counts of conspiracy to distribute cocaine, seven counts of distribution of cocaine, three counts of distribution of methamphetamine, two counts of distribution of heroin, one count of sale of a firearm to a prohibited person, and one count of possession of a destructive device (Molotov cocktail).

“Today's operation has dealt a severe blow to one of the most dangerous street gangs operating in this area,” said Robert Schoch, special agent in charge for ICE investigations in Los Angeles. “Attacking and dismantling these ruthless organizations is one of ICE's enforcement priorities and we will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to protect the community from the violence, crime and fear fostered by these gangs.”

The investigation into the Eastside gang was conducted by the Santa Barbara Police Department; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; and the Santa Barbara County District Attorney's Office.

The main investigating agencies received assistance during this morning's takedown from the Drug Enforcement Administration, the California Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement, the United States Marshals Service, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department, the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department, the Santa Maria Police Department, the Lompoc Police Department, the Ventura County Sheriff's Department, the Ventura Police Department, the Oxnard Police Department, the Santa Paula Police Department, the Santa Barbara County Probation Department, and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (Parole Operations).

CONTACT: Assistant United States Attorney Mark R. Aveis
(213) 894-4477

Assistant United States Attorney E. Martin Estrada
(213) 894-3358