

News Release
U.S. Department of Justice
United States Attorney
District of Rhode Island



January 28, 2005



Pawtucket man is sentenced in "drugs-for-guns" trade

PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- A federal judge today sentenced **Benny Vasconcelos**, 22, of Pawtucket, to five years in federal prison for crack-cocaine trafficking and being a felon in possession of firearms. **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)** agents arrested Vasconcelos in August after he traded a half-ounce of crack cocaine for two handguns.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the sentence, which U.S. District Court Judge Mary M. Lisi imposed in U.S. District Court, Providence.

In October, Vasconcelos pleaded guilty to being a felon in possession of a firearm and distributing more than five grams of crack cocaine. At the plea hearing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Luis M. Matos said that the government could prove that Vasconcelos gave an undercover ATF agent approximately ½ ounce of crack cocaine in exchange for two handguns.

On August 11, Vasconcelos met with an undercover ATF agent at a restaurant on George Street, Pawtucket. He took two pistols from the trunk of the agent's car and put a package of crack cocaine into the trunk. A team of agents then arrested Vasconcelos.

Vasconcelos, of 289 Lonsdale Avenue, First Floor, has a prior state felony conviction for carrying a pistol without a license.

-more-

Project Safe Neighborhoods

The **ATF Firearms Trafficking and Violent Crimes Task Force** investigated the case as part of **Project Safe Neighborhoods**, a Department of Justice initiative against gun crimes. Under Project Safe Neighborhoods, the U.S. Attorney's Office, working with Providence Police, ATF, the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office, and other agencies, aggressively prosecutes federal firearms offenses in an effort to incarcerate those responsible for gun violence and deter others from committing gun crimes. Since 2001, federal firearms prosecutions in Rhode Island have more than doubled and gun offenders have been sentenced to a total of more than 550 years in federal prison.

ATF agents and investigators from **Providence Police, Rhode Island State Police, Warwick Police**, and the **Rhode Island Attorney General's Office** are assigned to the ATF Task Force. **Pawtucket Police** also contributed to the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Matos prosecuted the case.

-30-

Contact: 401-709-5032

thomas.connell@usdoj.gov