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**DOZENS OF FEDERAL ARREST & SEARCH WARRANTS EXECUTED
AROUND ATLANTA AREA IN TAKEDOWN
OF TWO MAJOR DRUG ORGANIZATIONS**

Large Amounts Of Cocaine And Methamphetamine And Millions In Cash Seized

Atlanta, GA—Federal, state and local agents have completed the initial searches and arrests in two multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency investigations coordinated through the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) program. The investigations target major Mexican drug trafficking organizations that smuggle cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana into the United States for distribution in Georgia, California, North Carolina, New York and elsewhere. These investigations focused on two separate Mexico-based drug organizations that regularly cooperated in using transportation routes into and out of the Atlanta area. Some of the recently seized evidence was displayed at a news conference at DEA Atlanta late Friday afternoon after the indictments were unsealed.

The evidence seized during the searches and arrests just over the past two days includes 111 kilograms of cocaine, 17 pounds of crystal meth, approximately \$8,000,000 to \$10,000,000 in cash and at least 32 firearms, including handguns and assault rifles.

The two investigations were code named “Operation Shooting Star” and “Operation Latitude Adjustment.”

Operation Shooting Star was initiated in October 2006 and was led by the David G. Wilhelm Atlanta OCDETF Strike Force. In March 2006, the Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force began investigating the Georgia-based traffickers identified in Operation Latitude Adjustment. Both investigations have been designated as OCDETF investigations, which recognizes the highest priority cases for Federal drug prosecution.

Operation Shooting Star has resulted in federal charges against 46 defendants, 35 of whom have been arrested to date, and the execution of 19 search warrants. Operation Latitude Adjustment has resulted in the federal indictment of 22 defendants, 12 of whom

have been arrested to date, and the execution of 6 search warrants.

According to the search warrant affidavits, these investigative efforts have determined that the targeted organizations regularly transported large quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana from the Mexican states of Nuevo Leon, Guerrero and Michoacan to the Atlanta area, and then transported currency accumulated from the sale of the drugs back through Atlanta to be smuggled across the Southwest border to Mexico.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said, “These operations have crushed two major drug trafficking organizations. The seizure of all this dope and all this money and the arrest of all of those players in the organization means that somewhere in Mexico right now, there are some very unhappy drug kingpins. Our message to them is that we will continue to do everything we can to make the Atlanta area a place where they don’t dare to operate. The two operations are allegedly linked by drug dealers using the same couriers of both drugs and money. Targets in both Operation Shooting Star and Operation Latitude Adjustment received narcotics from common suppliers in Mexico. These are ongoing investigations and our many agencies working together will continue the aggressive fight against the illegal drugs that poison communities in Georgia and across the country.”

Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of DEA Atlanta said, “Today, law enforcement disrupted and dismantled two distinct but inter-related Mexican-based drug trafficking organizations that shared common resources. These organizations might still be thriving, had it not been for the spirited efforts of over 300 dedicated law enforcement officers representing a myriad of agencies. We have removed in excess of 27 million dollars of filthy money from these traffickers and have taken thousands of pounds of dangerous drugs off of our streets. True justice has been served.”

Jack Killorin, Atlanta HIDTA Director, said, “Today’s operation is a major strike against the Mexican drug cartels that have made the Atlanta Metropolitan area a hub of drug distribution in the Eastern United States. In Georgia, this result required the highest level of coordination among the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Wilhelm OCDETF Strike Force and the Atlanta High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force. The HIDTA effort was led by a DEA special agent and an Atlanta Police Department investigator, but involved all HIDTA participating agencies. Communities around the country are benefitting today from their collaborative effort, dedication, and no small sacrifice.”

According to United States Attorney Nahmias and the information contained in the search warrant affidavits and other court documents:

In **Operation Shooting Star**, the drug trafficking organization allegedly coordinated the receipt and distribution of cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana to states all along the Eastern Seaboard and into the Midwest. The organization also used Atlanta as the hub for the collection of drug proceeds from its East Coast distributors for shipment back to Mexico. In just the six months preceding the takedown on December 6, 2007, Operation Shooting Star seized over \$12,000,000 in drugs and drug proceeds just from the Atlanta area, along with numerous weapons, including handguns and assault rifles. The investigation also has identified and dismantled sham businesses established by the organization that were used to facilitate and disguise its drug trafficking activities.

The 20 defendants indicted by a federal grand jury on December 4, 2007, in Operation Shooting Star are:

●JOSE LUIS BENITEZ-TORNES, a/k/a “Cholo”; MARIO ALBERTO GUERRERO-MARTINEZ, a/k/a “Moyo,” and “Pepe”; “EL AS,” a/k/a “Ace,” (real name unknown); FNU LNU, a/k/a “Liceniado”; FNU LNU, a/k/a “Rucco”; FNU LNU, a/k/a “Tejon”; FNU LNU, a/k/a “Peluche”; EDGAR CAMACHO TORRES, a/k/a “Pollo”; RAMIRO OCHOA PENALOZA, a/k/a “Medico”; OPHELIA PINEDA; FRANCISCO VEGA SANTANA, a/k/a “Fraí”; ENEYDA ROMERO MOLINA, a/k/a “Nena”; FNU LNU, a/k/a “Jonathan”; JOAQUIN SUAREZ FLORES; JUAN ANTONIO RAMOS SANCHEZ; “JORGE” (real name unknown); LUIS CORDERO PENA; JOSE MACIAS MARTINEZ; JESUS EMMANUEL GUADARRAMA; FELIPE SANTANA; and FAUSTO VILLA-MOJICA, a/k/a “Guero.”

25 additional defendants were charged by criminal complaints filed on December 6 and 7, 2007, in Operation Shooting Star:

ALFONSO RODRIGUEZ FRANCO, a/k/a “CHAVO”; KEVIN JIMENEZ-CASTILLO, a/k/a “JOSE”; J. JESUS TORRES-OCHOA; JOSE MENDOZA-SOLORZANO; DAMIAN LOPEZ-GONZALEZ, a/k/a “UM-2”; ALEJANDRO GUTIERREZ-BEIZA; ANTERO PINEDA-CAMACHO; JULIAN ORTUNO-HERRERA; MARTIN MAGANA-BERNAL; ANGEL HARO-PEREZ, a/k/a “UM-23”; ARTURO TORRES-ZARAGOZA, a/k/a “ANDRES FRUTOS”; JESUS GARCIA CORONA, a/k/a “UM-76”; LEOPOLDO CASTANDA HERRERA; JOSE JESUS ESPINOZA FARIA; JOSE MAGANA ZAVALA; SALVADOR GONZALEZ-FLORES; JULIO CESAR AVALOS CERPAS, a/k/a “CESAR”; VICTOR GONZALEZ-FLORES; AURELIO CHAVEZ MALDONADO, a/k/a “KIYE”; CARLOS ALBERTO GUTIERREZ; JOSE TAPIA-CORNESO, a/k/a “UM-144”; MANUEL MAGANA-SAGRERO; LORENZO PINEDA-IBARRA, a/k/a “UM-1247”; JUAN AGUIAR MARTINEZ, a/k/a “UM-237”; and MARCO ANTONIO RODRIGUEZ MAGANA, a/k/a “TONO.”

In **Operation Latitude Adjustment**, the drug trafficking organization allegedly used Atlanta primarily as a transshipment and distribution point. While some of the drugs may have stayed in the Atlanta area for consumption, investigating agents believe the

majority of the drugs were forwarded to other areas along the East Coast of the United States, including Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, and Virginia.

The California portion of the operation, called Operation Funk 49, began in April 2004, after tips led investigators to distributors in San Diego, California, which began a three-year undercover investigation in that area. Federal, state, and local law enforcement in San Diego have executed over a dozen coordinated search warrants resulting in the arrests of 59 defendants there, as well as the confiscation of 1,246 pounds of cocaine, 604 pounds of methamphetamine, two pounds of heroin, and over \$9.1 million in cash. In Georgia, over 585 pounds of cocaine were seized as well as \$1.26 million dollars. An additional \$767,000 was seized by DEA in New York as the result of information uncovered in the investigation.

22 defendants were indicted by a federal grand jury in Atlanta on December 4, 2007, in Operation Latitude Adjustment:

●RAMIRO CAMPUZANO-VELAZCO a/k/a “Compadre,” 38, of Atlanta; RIGOBERTO SANCHEZ a/k/a “Rigo,” 22, of Buford, Georgia; GUILLERMO CAMPUZANO-VELASCO a/k/a “Memo,” 23, of Buford, Georgia; MARCO ANTONIO GONZALEZ-PULIDO age unknown, a/k/a “El Musico,” of Marietta, Georgia; TROY PALMER, 43, of Atlanta, Georgia; ROBERT RICHARDS, 30, of Atlanta, Georgia; NOAH NEVILL, 25, of Atlanta, Georgia; JOHN DENNIS CHAPMAN, 57, of Atlanta, Georgia; FERNANDO LNU (last name unknown) a/k/a “Nando,” age unknown, of Atlanta, Georgia; WILLIE LNU, age unknown, of Duluth, Georgia; ERIC LNU, age unknown, of Duluth, Georgia; ESTEBAN LNU, age unknown, of Buford, Georgia; ROSA LNU, age unknown, of Norcross, Georgia; “PINTOR” real name and age unknown, of Texas; “TITO,” real name and age unknown, of California; FAUSTINO GUTIERREZ-PLANCARTE, a/k/a “Josillo,” 38, of Sacramento, California; JUAN CARLOS QUEZADA, 26, of Palo Alto, California; and BRIAN JOHN PRATTICO, (age unknown) of Atlanta, Georgia. In addition, defendants believed to be located in Mexico include: LUIS GONZALES-HERRERA a/k/a “Francisco Ramirez” and “Pepe;” MIGUEL RUBIO-ZAMORA, a/k/a “Javier Arreola,” and “Rana;” LUCIO GONZALEZ-MARTINEZ, a/k/a “Manuel Gonzalez-Pacheco,” and “Chano;” DONA COLUMBA-VELAZCO; and “ALMA,” (real name unknown).

These cases are being investigated by Special Agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Wilhelm Atlanta OCDETF Strike Force, Atlanta HIDTA Task Force, San Diego and San Jose, California, offices of the DEA, and the South Carolina State Patrol.

The Wilhelm Atlanta OCDETF Strike Force team utilized agents and officers from the DEA, FBI, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, United States Marshal’s Service, Fayette County Sheriff’s

Office, Doraville Police Department, Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Georgia Department of Corrections, DeKalb County Police Department, and Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles. The Strike Force is named in honor of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Assistant Special Agent in Charge David G. Wilhelm, who was murdered in Atlanta in March 2005.

The Atlanta HIDTA Task Force is comprised of investigators from the Atlanta Police Department, DEA, the Georgia National Guard, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, ATF, the Fulton County Police Department, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Georgia Department of Corrections, the Cobb County Police Department, the Alpharetta Police Department, the Roswell Police Department, the East Point Police Department, the Clayton County Police Department, IRS-Criminal Investigation, ICE, the DeKalb Police Department, the Gwinnett County Police Department, the Georgia State Patrol, the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office, and the Barrow County Sheriff's Office. Other members of the HIDTA are the United States Attorney, the Fulton County District Attorney, the Georgia State Attorney General, the Gwinnett County District Attorney, the DeKalb County District Attorney, and the Cobb County District Attorney. United States Attorney David Nahmias currently serves as chair of the HIDTA Executive Board.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta recommends parents and children learn about the dangers of drugs at the following web site: www.justthinktwice.com.

Assistant United States Attorneys Richard A. Rice, Jr. and Elizabeth M. Hathaway are prosecuting the Operation Shooting Star case, and Assistant United States Attorney Cassandra Schansman is prosecuting the Operation Latitude Adjustment 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.