



PRESS RELEASE

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**TWENTY-FIVE CHARGED WITH FEDERAL NARCOTICS
TRAFFICKING OFFENSES AS A RESULT OF DEA-LED
INVESTIGATION IN SAN MIGUEL COUNTY**

ALBUQUERQUE – On Aug. 7, 2012, a federal grand jury returned indictments charging 25 individuals with narcotics trafficking offenses based on a DEA-led investigation into drug trafficking in San Miguel County, N.M. Yesterday, teams of federal, state and local law enforcement officers arrested 18 of the 25 defendants charged, and executed 14 federal search warrants at residences in Las Vegas, N.M., and three federal search warrants at residences in Albuquerque, N.M.

In addition to those arrested based on federal indictments, another two individuals were arrested on state charges. Four individuals who are facing federal charges are currently in state custody on state charges; they will be transferred to federal custody to face the federal charges. Another federal defendant surrendered himself this morning. Two federal defendants have yet to be apprehended and are considered fugitives.

The charges against the 25 federal defendants and two state defendants are the result of “Operation Smack City,” a ten-month multi-agency investigation led by the DEA that targeted drug traffickers in San Miguel County, a part of the state that has the country’s highest heroin overdose death-rate and a history of significant drug abuse. The investigation involved a series of undercover hand-to-hand drug transactions by undercover officers, including numerous transactions that occurred in the vicinity of an elementary school and a public university.

During the investigation, officers seized a kilogram of cocaine and \$29,000 in addition to the narcotics obtained during the undercover drug transactions. During the course of yesterday’s law enforcement operation, officers seized approximately \$9,000, a handgun, 14 vehicles, two motorcycles and an ATV, which the United States will seek to forfeit. The United States also is seeking to forfeit residences located at 702 Pinon Street, Las Vegas, N.M.; 510 9th Street, Las Vegas, N.M.; 2701 N. 7th Street, #74, Las Vegas, N.M.; and 715 Taos Street, Las Vegas, N.M.

The results of the investigation and yesterday’s law enforcement operation were announced by U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales, 4th Judicial District Attorney Richard D.

Flores, Special Agent in Charge Joseph M. Arabit of DEA's El Paso Field Division, San Miguel County Sheriff Benjie D. Vigil, and Las Vegas Police Chief Christian Montaña during a press conference in Las Vegas, N.M., this morning.

In announcing the results of the investigation, U.S. Attorney Gonzales said, "There are many very sad and tragic consequences from drug trafficking and addiction. And it is especially sad when good law-abiding people who have lived in homes and neighborhoods for decades cannot leave their front porches without fear of violence or intimidation from crack and heroin dealers who have moved in. The operation this week is one important step toward restoring beautiful and historic Las Vegas."

District Attorney Flores said, "Today is definitely a good day for law enforcement and for our community! Approximately ten to twelve months ago, my office sought, in conjunction with the local HIDTA Region IV Narcotics Drug Task Force, the assistance of the federal agencies, in our attempt to rid our community of this scourge known as drug addiction and drug trafficking. Numerous meetings were held with our local agents tasked with the responsibility of arresting and removing these drug traffickers from our streets. In November 2011, I met with U.S. Attorney Ken Gonzales and asked for his help. Today, with these arrests, we are seeing the fruits of these meetings and of their labor. The success of this operation is a prime example of how local communities benefit from the coordinated efforts involving local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. I can't thank enough the men and women involved in this operation."

"This investigation targeted the heroin and crack cocaine distribution network of a drug trafficking organization operating in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and surrounding areas. The resulting arrests, which strike a significant blow to this organization, will have an immediate, positive impact in local neighborhoods, where the abuse of these drugs takes a tremendous toll," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Arabit. "We will continue to work closely with our local law enforcement partners to hold drug dealers responsible for the harm they cause and, in turn, to improve the overall quality of life for residents of Las Vegas and New Mexico as a whole."

"The San Miguel County Sheriff's Office is proud to be part of the cooperative regional law enforcement response that the residents of San Miguel County deserve and have come to expect," said San Miguel County Sheriff Vigil. "The success of this joint operation is an example of how local communities benefit from coordinated efforts involving local, county, state and federal law enforcement. I want to thank the officers who participated in this operation for helping to make the citizens of San Miguel County safer."

Las Vegas Police Chief Montaña added, "This operation struck a major blow to the Las Vegas area drug traffickers which will affect overall crime in general. We shall continue to actively seek out drug dealers for the betterment of our community. This endeavor was prompted through the need being identified by our local District Attorney Richard D. Flores and members of the Las Vegas Police Department assigned to the Region IV Narcotics Task Force to U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales. This operation was successful due to the good collaboration between local, state and federal law enforcement agencies and in particular the level of

professionalism displayed by each and every individual involved in this lengthy and arduous operation. I would like to personally and sincerely thank everybody involved.”

The cases resulting from this investigation were investigated by the DEA, the HIDTA Region IV Narcotics Task Force, the New Mexico State Police and the Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Office. The following agencies participated in yesterday’s law enforcement operation: the San Miguel County Sheriff’s Office, the Las Vegas Police Department, the Albuquerque Police Department, the Rio Rancho Police Department, the Corrales Police Department, Homeland Securities Investigations, the U.S. Marshal’s Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives, and U.S. Border Patrol.

The federal cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Samuel A. Hurtado, Kimberly A. Brawley and Shammara H. Henderson. The state cases are being prosecuted by the 4th Judicial District Attorney’s Office.

Operation Smack City was designated as part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (“OCDETF”) program, a nationwide Department of Justice program that combines the resources and unique expertise of federal agencies, along with their local counterparts, in a coordinated effort to disrupt and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations. HIDTA, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program, is funded by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Charges in indictments are only accusations. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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