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News Release

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St. Paul man sentenced in large drug-trafficking operation

MINNEAPOLIS—Earlier today in federal court in St. Paul, a 45-year-old St. Paul man was sentenced for his role as the leader of an organization that distributed large quantities of cocaine and marijuana in Minnesota between 2005 and October of 2010. United States District Court Judge Donovan W. Frank sentenced Jesus “Jesse” Mendoza to 252 months in prison on one count of conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five or more kilograms of cocaine and 100 or more kilograms of marijuana, as well as one count of aiding and abetting money laundering. On January 19, 2011, Mendoza was charged, along with nine co-conspirators, in a superseding indictment. He pleaded guilty on July 28, 2011.

Following today’s sentencing, Dan Moren, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Minneapolis-St Paul office of the Drug Enforcement Administration (“DEA”), said, “Prior to his arrest, Jessie Mendoza was a long-tenured leader of a Minnesota-based drug trafficking organization distributing illicit drugs and laundering money. The Mendoza organization utilized private aircraft and commercial vehicles to smuggle cocaine and marijuana from California to Minnesota -- Mr. Mendoza personally amassed millions of dollars running this criminal enterprise. The successful resolution of this investigation was made possible through the combined efforts of the DEA, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Washington County Drug Task Force, the Bloomington Police Department, the Plymouth Police Department, the Wisconsin Department of Criminal Investigation, and the U.S. Attorney’s Office.”

In his plea agreement, Mendoza admitted that from January of 2005 through October of 2010 he led a drug-trafficking organization that moved controlled substances from other states, including California, and distributed them throughout Minnesota. Mendoza, who was arrested in December of 2010, admitted he coordinated the shipment of controlled substances, including methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana. In addition, Mendoza admitted that the drugs were shipped via automobile, commercial truck and even private aircraft.

Mendoza also admitted attempting to manufacture marijuana by supplying approximately \$100,000 to equip a 1,000-plant capacity indoor marijuana grow in Minnesota, securing a location, and arranging for a co-conspirator to operate it.

In addition, Mendoza admitted concealing the nature of his assets because they derived from the sale of controlled substances. On December 28, 2006, Mendoza admitted he owned a St. Paul property, but made it appear that another co-conspirator purchased it. Both wanted to conceal their assets and the fact the funds used were proceeds from the sale of controlled substances. The property was often used to store controlled substances prior to distribution.

Nine of Mendoza's co-conspirators have already pleaded guilty, six of which have already been sentenced. Several of the defendants attempted to conceal the proceeds of their illegal drug-trafficking operation by purchasing a number of high-priced items, including a 1965 Cessna single-engine airplane, custom motorcycles, other vehicles and real estate.

Those sentenced include:

On September 25, 2012, Gordon Joseph Larson, age 50, unknown address, was sentenced to 50 months in prison on one count of conspiracy. He pleaded guilty on July 13, 2011. In his plea agreement, Larson admitted receiving controlled substances from Mendoza to distribute.

On August 31, 2012, Mendoza's wife, Dawn Deyonne Mendoza, age 36, also of St. Paul, was sentenced to 12 months and one day in prison on one count of aiding and abetting money laundering. She pleaded guilty on July 26, 2011. In her plea agreement, Dawn Mendoza admitted purchasing two vehicles -- a 2007 Chrysler Aspen for \$25,300 and a 2008 Saturn VUE for \$20,738 -- knowing that it was to disguise the fact that the money was derived from the sale of illegal drugs. In both purchases, the cash came from Jesse Mendoza, but Dawn Mendoza was listed as the owner.

On August 31, 2012, Angela Marie Cilek, age 36, unknown address, was sentenced to 18 months on one count of conspiracy. She pleaded guilty on April 5, 2011. In her plea agreement, Cilek admitted joining the group in 2005, but did not actively participate in the group's activities continuously during that time period. Upon request by Jesse Mendoza, Cilek delivered drugs and delivered proceeds between Mendoza and his distributors. In addition, Cilek admitted receiving money and drugs as compensation.

On August 30, 2012, Todd Patrick Laughlin, age 39, of Forest Lake, was sentenced to 70 months on one count of conspiracy. He pleaded guilty on February 23, 2011. In his plea

agreement, Laughlin admitted joining the organization in 2007 and assisted with the storage, transportation and distribution of marijuana. He also allowed the group to use his storage facility in Forest Lake to store marijuana.

On August 30, 2012, Craig Allen Randall, 49, of St. Paul, was sentenced to 64 months on one count of conspiracy. He pleaded guilty on April 28, 2011. In his plea agreement, Randall admitted joining the group in 2005 and distributed cocaine. Randall also admitted assisting with the storage, packaging, transportation and distribution at Jesse Mendoza's request.

On November 6, 2012, Roger Delrio, age 44, of Roseville, was sentenced to five years of probation on one count of aiding and abetting money laundering. He pleaded guilty on July 21, 2011. In his plea agreement, Delrio admitted he and Jesse Mendoza conducted the sale of a St. Paul property in a manner designed to make it appear that Delrio was the property owner, when in fact Mendoza was the owner. Delrio admitted the sale was conducted so Mendoza could conceal his assets, which were the proceeds of illegal drug distribution.

Co-conspirators who have not yet been sentenced are Patrick James Lauer, age 53, of St. Paul; Seth Paul Neel, age 32, of Riverside, California; and Larry Chester Sheehan, age 45, of Woodbury. All three pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy. They each face a potential maximum penalty of life in prison, with a mandatory minimum penalty of ten years.

To date, law enforcement has seized more than \$2 million in assets related to the drug distribution, including seven vehicles, two motorcycles, more than \$817,000 in cash, two residential properties, and nearly \$700,000 in jewelry.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Steven L. Schleicher and Andrew R. Winter.

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