

DA: Suffolk Heroin Dealers Busted

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Three kilos of heroin. Fifty firearms. OxyContin, marijuana, cocaine. Over \$200,000 in U.S. currency.

March 14 marked the largest heroin drug seizure in county history, Suffolk District Attorney Tom Spota announced at a March 19 press conference. Thirteen people were arrested in what was called Operation Guapo.

They included "kingpin" Felix Cruz, 29, of Brooklyn, who prosecutors say made regular heroin deliveries to Gilberto "Macho" Rivera, 25, of Oakdale, for distribution in western Suffolk. The pair has pleaded not guilty.

Cruz would deliver two sleeves of heroin to Rivera every 10 days, Spota said. Each sleeve contained 5,000 "decks"; each deck sold for \$10 on the streets of Suffolk County.

Major Walter Heesch, commander of state police on Long Island, said that one kilogram of heroin is worth about \$350,000 on the street. All told, Rivera, who was also arrested, was taking in about \$40,000 every 10 days, according to Spota.

Among the 13 arrested were Robert Pittell of Centerport and James DeVito of Nesconset, both alleged to be distributors for Rivera. Pittell had a "significant number of weapons in his possession" when arrested, including a sawed-off shotgun and .45 caliber pistol, Spota said.

Three ounces of cocaine were retrieved from a cabinet above DeVito's kitchen sink during the execution of a search warrant, according to the district attorney.

Pittell pleaded not guilty March 17 to second-degree conspiracy and two counts of third-degree criminal weapon possession. In addition to conspiracy, DeVito has pleaded not guilty to third-degree cocaine possession.

Cruz was walking around with a fully automatic assault weapon when he was picked up, law enforcement officials said. Taking his cue from gangster movies, Cruz was carrying around the weapon in a violin case when they apprehended him, Heesch said. "These were real bad guys," he said.

Last September, police became aware of a man named Willie Hart, who they allege was dealing cocaine and heroin in the Bay Shore area, according to the law enforcement officials. Police subsequently put Hart under surveillance. Information gleaned eventually led to the arrest last Saturday of "the major distribution ring in Suffolk County," said Spota.

Several attorneys representing the alleged dealers individually deferred comment until they received the extent of the evidence against their clients.

James Kousouros of Kew Gardens, who is representing Edward Davis, 49, of Bay Shore — who pleaded not guilty to second-degree conspiracy — spoke out immediately in defense of Davis's innocence.

"We know so little at this point," Kousouros said, as prosecutors had yet to turn over the evidence against his client. "When the dust settles and all the facts are out, you'll see he's not the person that's being portrayed by the DA's office right now."

The mass arrest is only the first move in the authorities' counterstrike against Suffolk dealers, the district attorney added. "We intend to make far more arrests within this ring," he said. "We have made 13 arrests so far, and we anticipate doubling that."

Suffolk police made 918 heroin-related arrests last year and another 111 in the first five weeks of 2009. Sixty-three fatal heroin overdoses were reported in the county last year.

Spota also announced the creation of a "multiagency heroin drug task force" comprised of state police, the federal drug enforcement agency, Suffolk police and the sheriff's office. "We are going to stop this on the street level," Spota said.

"Operation Guapo epitomizes the success that can be achieved when policing efforts and resources are combined at the local, state and federal levels," said Assistant Special Agent in Charge Joseph Evans of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. "We will not tolerate this plague ruining our communities."

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers and the sheriff's office have established a reward program for drug-related information aimed at reducing students' exposure to heroin.

"Unfortunately heroin has moved into our schools and has become the drug of choice for our youth," Spota said. "We need to get the community involved."

Residents can report drug activity anonymously at 800-220-TIPS.