

32 charged in Metro drug ring - Federal prosecutors say suspects netted \$178 million, making it the largest drug case in state history.

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Federal prosecutors have charged 32 people in a massive Metro Detroit-based drug ring, accusing them of netting more than \$178 million in drug proceeds -- the largest drug case in Michigan.

Federal agents seized \$13 million in cash and 8,800 pounds of marijuana in the 16-month investigation that involved 19 different state, federal and local agencies, officials said Monday.

"We have taken out a very significant, sophisticated drug-trafficking organization thanks to the cooperation of federal, state and local law enforcement," U.S. Attorney Stephen J. Murphy III said.

This is the latest in a string of major drug conspiracy cases; since February 2004, federal prosecutors have charged four groups of people with earning a combined \$400 million in drug profits.

The investigation began with the raid of a Novi hotel in March 2004 that turned up \$3.4 million in cash in alleged drug proceeds and coded drug transaction ledgers. The probe led to dozens of wiretaps and the decoding of computer records that culminated in the 30-count indictment unsealed Monday.

Prosecutors moved to seize expensive homes and condominiums in Farmington Hills, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Southfield, Detroit and West Bloomfield and Canton townships -- saying the drug gang had earned more than \$178 million supplying Metro Detroit with cocaine and marijuana by bringing it from Arizona and California.

Federal agents filed forfeiture requests to seize 16 properties allegedly used to launder drug money, along with five luxury cars and four bank accounts. Among them was a \$1.35 million Detroit apartment building purchased in 2001 by former University of Michigan basketball star Robert Traylor, now with the Cleveland Cavaliers. Traylor is not accused of wrongdoing.

Internal Revenue Service Special Agent Kevin Boudreau said in an affidavit that the alleged ring leader, Quansand **Lewis**, used other people to purchase multimillion-dollar property in Metro Detroit. Specifically, the IRS said **Lewis** used Traylor "in order to conceal **Lewis**' ownership from law enforcement."

Nearly all the suspects were in custody Monday after more than 50 federal, state and local agents made coordinated arrests. Most are from Metro Detroit.

One man charged, Lavert "Vito" Dafney, 33, of Canton Township, was arrested Monday at a Cedar Point resort hotel in Sandusky, Ohio.

Four others were arrested at the Ritz Carlton in Orlando, Fla., while the alleged ringleader, 35-year-old **Lewis**, of Detroit, was arrested in Cleveland on Friday as he prepared to board a flight to Atlanta.

Steve Fishman, a lawyer for **Lewis**, declined to comment on his client's status because he didn't know his whereabouts.

Lewis has been a major drug dealer in Metro Detroit since 1990, the government said -- and previously was partners with Tommie Hodges, another major drug dealer before the pair had a falling out.

In 2004, a grand jury in Detroit indicted Hodges, of St. Clair Shores, and Leonard Shoulders of Detroit, claiming the two earned more than \$50 million in drug profits and distributed more than 25 tons of marijuana over the past three years.

The government said Hodges and Shoulders used homes in Detroit to distribute and store much of the marijuana. And while the pair laundered money and purchased cars, boats and land, they also helped escalate a blood feud with a rival group led by **Lewis**, said DEA Special Agent Harry Swain, a member of a joint Detroit homicide task force.

"The task force has identified over 11 homicides and four house fire bombings linked to the feud between Tommie Hodges and **Quasand Lewis**," Swain said in an affidavit.

In total, 18 people have been indicted and 17 -- including Hodges -- have pleaded guilty.

Traylor incorporated RT Adventure LLC in June 2001. Boudreau said in an affidavit unsealed Monday that the government believes that one of the alleged drug dealers, Will Ulmer, is "conducting business ... for Ulmer Construction, RT Adventure LLC and other related entities."

RT Adventure LLC has never filed a federal tax return and the IRS could find no evidence that Traylor is "reporting any income/expenses on his personal income tax returns from 2001 to 2003 relating to RT Adventure LLC," Boudreau said.

The U.S. Attorney's Office hasn't presented any evidence that Traylor knew about the drug conspiracy.

A message left for Traylor with the Cleveland Cavaliers was not returned.

The **Lewis** case is the largest drug operation in Metro Detroit in memory, said Maurice Aouate, the special agent in charge of the Internal Revenue Service's criminal division in Detroit.

Outline of a raid

Y Federal agents have seized \$13 million in cash, charged 32 suspects and seized more than 8,800 pounds of marijuana during the 16-month investigation.

Y The drug ring allegedly earned more than \$178 million in drug proceeds -- the largest ever drug conspiracy in Michigan.

Y Prosecutors moved to seize homes in Farmington Hills, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Southfield, Detroit and West Bloomfield and Canton townships.

Caption: Traylor

Section: Metro

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