

JURY INDICTS 29 IN DRUG DEALING - U.S. ATTORNEY SAYS GANG TIED TO HOME BREAK-INS

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Thursday, September 26, 2002

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A federal grand jury indicted 29 alleged members of the **Latin Counts**, a notorious southwest Detroit gang, on drug-dealing, weapons and other charges, federal officials announced Wednesday.

"For years, these individuals terrorized law-abiding citizens in our district," U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Collins said while announcing the indictments at a news conference in Detroit. "It is our hope, through this indictment, that residents, particularly in southwest Detroit, will be able to sleep better."

Collins said members of the drug ring broke into six homes between December 1998 and February 2001 to try to steal guns, drugs and money.

He said the gang broke into at least two homes of people not involved in drug dealing. Children lived in the homes. No one was injured in the invasions, authorities said.

All but two of the people charged in the indictment have been arrested, Collins said. He said many were in custody on charges unrelated to the indictment.

The suspects were charged with conspiring to distribute marijuana and cocaine since the mid-1990s and with using firearms in the dealing.

The indictments follow a criminal complaint filed in April against Santiago Santillana. In an affidavit accompanying the complaint, an FBI agent said Detroit police learned about gang activities from a confidential witness, who said Santillana was the driver for several home break-ins.

The witness said the gang took 50 pounds of marijuana and nearly \$10,000 in one invasion, prompting a shoot-out with the resident. The gang members sold the marijuana and split the proceeds, according to an FBI affidavit filed in the case.

In another break-in, one gang member was shot in the arm.

The affidavit said gang members posed as federal agents by wearing baseball caps bearing the initials of FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF).

Charged in the indictment were Waunta Watts, Melvin (Fat Mel) Martin, Jessica Lockard, Edwardo (Uncle Joe) Hinton, David Ciochetto, Mario Mendez, Billy Joe (Whiteboy) Adams, Santiago (Chango) Santillana, Horatio Valentin, Michael (Little Ranger) Asaro, Adrian Guzman, Emanuel (E) Raynor, Jonathon (John John) Begley, Gary Lankford, Jose (Chuy) Poparawa, Robert (Snoop) Drain, Joey (Joey C) Ponce, Jose (Lalo) Ortega, Danny McIntee, Gus Eggers, Derek (D-nice) Bonasse, Andrew (Big Andy) Asaro Sr., Sergio Molina, James David (J.D.) Austin, Adrian Picena, Anthony DelPiombo, Thomas Luna, Andrew (Ranger) Asaro Jr. and Bridgette Walsh.

Martin and Mendez also were charged with continuing a criminal enterprise.

The charges carry penalties ranging from 7 years to life in prison upon conviction.

Several of the suspects were arraigned Wednesday in U.S. District Court. Some were held pending further hearings. Others were released on \$10,000 personal bonds.

Santillana was indicted in June on a charge of using a firearm during the commission of a drug trafficking offense and remains in custody.

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Section: NWS

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Index Terms: INDICTMENT ; MULTIPLE ; DRUG ; CRIME ; LATIN COUNTS; NAMELIST

Record Number: 0209260236

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