

NEWS RELEASE



Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office
71 Monument Park
Freehold, New Jersey 07728
732/ 431-7160
Luis A. Valentin, Prosecutor



United States Department of Justice
Drug Enforcement Administration
Mulberry Street, Newark, N.J. 07102

Contact: Douglas S. Collier, M.A.
Special Agent /Public Information Officer, NJ Div
973/ 776-1143 (Office); 862/ 849-9833 (Cell)
Email: Douglas.Collier@usdoj.gov

LEADER OF MANALAPAN BASED NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AND MONEY LAUNDERING NETWORK SENTENCED TO TWENTY FIVE YEARS IN PRISON

A COOPERATIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFORT

On August 26, 2010, Monmouth County Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin and John G. McCabe, Jr., of the Drug Enforcement Administration, New Jersey Division, Acting Special Agent in Charge, announced that Vicente Esteves, 37, of Manalapan Township, N.J., was sentenced to a 25 year State Prison term in connection with his role as the head of an international narcotics trafficking and money laundering enterprise which was based in Manalapan Township. Esteves, who pled guilty to second degree Racketeering Conspiracy, first degree Leader of Narcotics Trafficking Network, first degree Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance with Intent to Distribute, and two first degree charges of Financial Facilitation of Criminal Activity, must serve 12 ½ years before he becomes eligible for release on parole.

The sentence was imposed by Monmouth County Superior Court Judge Anthony J. Mellaci, Jr., who also ordered Esteves to pay a fine of \$1.5 million. Earlier this month three individuals were sentenced in Monmouth County Superior Court for their respective roles in the criminal enterprise. Brijido Carlos Noyola, 27, of Brownsville, Texas, was sentenced to a 7 year State Prison term for the second degree charge of Racketeering Conspiracy; Michael Lopez, 37, of Perth Amboy, N.J., was sentenced to a non-custodial term of probation for the third degree charge of Conspiracy to commit Financial Facilitation of Criminal Activity; Cesar Cabrera Cepeda, 41, of Old Bridge, N.J., who pled guilty to the third degree charge of Financial Facilitation of Criminal Activity, was admitted into the Pre-Trial Intervention Program.

Five other individuals are pending sentencing in the Monmouth County Superior Court for their involvement in the scheme. Hector Rodriguez is scheduled to be sentenced on August 27, 2010; Dennis Krousos, Mark Edwards, Leonardo Hernandez and Danilo Chen Pui are scheduled to be sentenced on September 24, 2010.

The charges stem from the activities of the criminal enterprise which was headed by Esteves. The Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration - New Jersey Division joined forces and investigated the narcotics trafficking and money laundering organization. The investigation revealed that the enterprise was responsible for the distribution of significant quantities of cocaine which came from sources across the United States and other countries to Monmouth County and the surrounding area.

The investigation, dubbed "OPERATION UNBOUNDED," commenced in the Spring of 2007 when members of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (hereinafter "D.E.A.") obtained information that the organization was based in Manalapan Township and was also operating in Middlesex County, N.J. The base of operations of the organization was a multi-million dollar gated property located in Manalapan Township which was owned by Esteves, and his wife, Chantal Esteves. The investigation revealed that the organization's criminal activities occurred in multiple states and also operated internationally, to include, without limitation, Mexico and Colombia.

The investigation ultimately revealed that the organization's method of operation was to import cocaine from Mexico and Colombia and use 2 corporations owned by a leader of the organization to launder the financial proceeds. The investigation also revealed that members of the organization were careful to never be in possession of both narcotics and large sums of cash at the same time. As an example, Cesar Cabrera Cepeda owned the Metro Club, a nightclub in New York City, N.Y., for a period of time. During that time Cesar Cabrera Cepeda co-mingled business funds with Vicente Esteves' illicit monies which enabled Esteves to facilitate his money laundering activities. Vicente Esteves' personal and business accounting and mortgage services were handled by Dennis Krousos, a certified public accountant and certified mortgage banker.

During the investigation, several seizures and arrests occurred, which without limitation included the following:

- On April 2, 2008, Danilo Chen Pui was traveling to meet Hector Rodriguez at a residence in the Old Bridge area of New Jersey. Danilo Chen Pui was arrested and found to be in possession of approximately \$600,000 in U.S. currency. A lawful search of this individual's residence in

Hackensack, N.J., resulted in the seizure of an approximate additional \$100,000 in U.S. currency.

- On May 30, 2008, Mark Edwards, 39, of Metuchen, N.J., was a passenger on board a commercial flight preparing to depart Newark Liberty International Airport for Miami, Florida, when he was arrested and found to be in possession of approximately \$100,000 in U.S. currency. (For more details concerning the investigation, please see the News Release previously issued by the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office on June 2, 2008, available on the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office's official website, "<http://www.prosecutor.co.monmouth.nj.us/>").

John G. McCabe, Jr., of the Drug Enforcement Administration, New Jersey Division, Acting Special Agent in Charge, stated, "This drug lord and his organization thought they were untouchable by camouflaging the true identity of their criminal enterprise. They utilized methods that reduced detection by law enforcement. However, when law enforcement agencies force multiply, there is no stronger authority. The Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office and the DEA, along with other law enforcement partners, displayed vigorous investigative efforts which led to the conviction and sentencing of this global trafficker."

Monmouth County Prosecutor Luis A. Valentin stated, "Esteves served as the leader of an international drug distribution and money laundering organization. "Operation Unbounded" resulted in the seizure of substantial quantities of narcotics which were destined for the streets of Monmouth County. We are thankful that by working together with our federal and other law enforcement partners, we were able to dismantle this organized illegal network." Prosecutor Valentin reiterated his appreciation to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration for their dedication and commitment to the investigation.

Released: August 26, 2010