



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

From: Michael Terry
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Re: Two Spring Hill Men Sentenced to 25 Years in Federal Prison for Conspiring to Distribute Drugs

Date: December 11, 2020

On 04-23-2019, the Hernando County Sheriff's Office, with assistance from the Drug Enforcement Agency, conducted a residential search warrant at 11283 Elgin Boulevard in Spring Hill.

The execution of the search warrant was the result of a months-long investigation into the manufacturing and distribution of methamphetamine.

As a result of the search warrant, detectives located 145 grams of cocaine, 1.3 grams of heroin, 380 grams of powdered methamphetamine, and 29.5 pounds of liquid pure methamphetamine.

Detectives also located two firearms and \$8,883 in U.S. currency.

The two men arrested at the residence were **Juan Arias Castillo H/M DOB/08-27-1981** and **Adan Barajas Maldonado H/M DOB/09-24-1985**. Both suspects were charged federally.

According to a press release from the Department of Justice, on 12-04-2020 U.S. District Court Judge Susan C. Bucklew sentenced Maldonado, of Mexico, to 25 years in prison for conspiring to distribute controlled substances and for possessing a gun to further his drug trafficking enterprise. Maldonado pleaded guilty on 10-30-2020.

U.S. District Court Judge Charlene E. Honeywell sentenced one of Maldonado's assistants, 32 year old Edward Rodriguez of New York, to 11 years and 3 months in prison for his role in the same drug distribution conspiracy. Rodriguez had pleaded guilty on 08-27-2020.

According to information presented in court, Maldonado and his co-defendant, Castillo, who are both affiliated with a Mexican drug cartel, operated a regional drug trafficking

organization (DTO) based in Spring Hill. Each week, over multiple years, they distributed more than 20 kilograms of highly pure methamphetamine, as well as smaller amounts of other drugs, to their network of kilogram-level dealers. The dealers, in turn, sold the drugs to lower-level suppliers.

Maldonado and Castillo lived together and operated their drug trafficking operation from a non-descript suburban home. The two employed several couriers/assistants, including Rodriguez, who picked up drugs in Texas after the drugs had been smuggled into the country from Mexico.

The couriers/assistants then drove the drugs to Florida, delivered them to Maldonado and Castillo's biggest customers, collected payments, wired drug profits to Mexico, and recruited others to wire money as well to evade law enforcement.

On 04-23-2019, law enforcement officers surveilling Maldonado and Castillo's residence observed them appearing to receive a drug delivery. They then executed a search warrant on the home. Inside they found, among other items, 29.5 pounds of liquid pure methamphetamine, 380 grams of powdered methamphetamine, 145 grams of cocaine, two guns, ammunition, a drug ledger, and evidence revealing how the drugs were smuggled over the border in car tires.

Castillo pleaded guilty for his role in the conspiracy and was sentenced to 25 years in prison. Two other defendants, Christian and Victor Santiago Rondon, have pleaded guilty and are scheduled to be sentenced in January 2021. One of Maldonado and Castillo's biggest customers, Jorge Ramirez, has pleaded guilty and is due to be sentenced in February 2021.

The Drug Enforcement Administration, in conjunction with the Hernando County Sheriff's Office and the Pasco Sheriff's Office, investigated this case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael M. Gordon is prosecuting this case.

The Office of Sheriff:

The Office of the Sheriff is established by the Florida Constitution. As a constitutional officer, the Sheriff has the exclusive authority to administer his or her agency and is responsible for preserving the peace throughout the entire county, carrying out the laws of the state, the orders of Florida courts, and the ordinances of the Board of County Commissioners. The Sheriff is the chief law enforcement and correctional officer of the county.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis was initially appointed as the Sheriff of Hernando County by the Governor in January of 2011. He was then elected by the people of Hernando County in 2012, ran unopposed in 2016, and was re-elected in 2020. Sheriff Nienhuis remains accountable to the people of Hernando County.