



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPERATION COCAINE COWBOYS
**TWO CARTHAGE RESIDENTS SENTENCED FOR
SOUTHERN MISSOURI COCAINE RING**

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that two Carthage, Mo., residents were sentenced in federal court today for their role in a conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of cocaine in southern Missouri.

The co-defendants are part of Operation Cocaine Cowboys, which charged a total of 36 federal defendants with illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales in southwest Missouri.

Robert Villanueva, 30, of Carthage, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright this morning to three years of probation in each of two separate cases, to run concurrently.

Donna M. Murphy, 47, of Carthage, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright this morning to three years of probation.

On May 3, 2002, **Villanueva** pleaded guilty to distributing cocaine in Jasper County on May 28, 2000. Villanueva also pleaded guilty, in a separate case, to distributing 500 grams or more of cocaine in Jasper, Lawrence, Webster and Greene Counties between Nov. 14, 1999 and Nov. 25, 2001.

On April 19, 2002, **Murphy** pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine and 500 grams or more of methamphetamine in Jasper County between November 1999 and Sept. 6, 2001.

Villanueva and **Murphy** are among 10 co-defendants in a 22-count indictment in the case of *United States v. Martin Macias, et al.* Eight co-defendants in *Macias* have now been sentenced, and one has pleaded guilty and awaits sentencing. **Villanueva** is also among 17 co-

defendants in a 47-count indictment in the case of *United States v. Caasimoro Gonzales, et al.* Eleven co-defendants in *Gonzales* have now been sentenced, and four have pleaded guilty and await sentencing.

Graves explained that these cases are part of a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints filed in January and February 2002 as a result of the 27-month multi-agency investigation into illegal drug trafficking and firearms sales.

Operation Cocaine Cowboys focused on an organization of individuals who were allegedly responsible for the delivery and distribution of multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana and other drugs from sources in California, Texas and Guatemala. As charged in a series of federal indictments and federal criminal complaints, Graves explained, 36 federal defendants allegedly distributed illegal narcotics, primarily in Jasper County, but also in at least four other Southwest Missouri counties (Christian, Greene, Lawrence and Webster) and elsewhere. Graves said that undercover officers made numerous purchases of illegal drugs and weapons as part of the investigation. In addition to the federal defendants, about 26 other individuals, including adults and juveniles, face a variety of state charges in related cases.

Of those 36 federal defendants, Graves said, 30 have been convicted and two remain fugitives. Charges against two defendants were dismissed in favor of state prosecution.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Cocaine Cowboys was investigated by officers from the Missouri States Highway Patrol and the Combined Ozarks Multijurisdictional Enforcement Team (COMET), in cooperation with numerous other law enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Jasper County Drug Task Force, Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC), and the Carthage Police Department. Assistance to Operation Cocaine Cowboys was provided by Greene, Jasper and Stone counties' sheriff's departments, the Joplin, Springfield, Oronogo and Webb City police departments and the U.S. Marshal's Service.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow