



NEWS RELEASE

**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
WESTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA**

John L. Brownlee
United States Attorney

Heidi Coy
Public Affairs Specialist

BB&T Building
310 First Street, S.W., Room 906
Roanoke, Virginia 24011-1935
Phone: (540) 857-2974
FAX: (540) 857-2179

July 30, 2007

LEADER OF LEE COUNTY OXYCODONE DRUG RING SENTENCED TO 21 YEARS' IMPRISONMENT

United States Attorney John L. Brownlee announced today that Teresa Annette Ely, a/k/a "Big Momma," was sentenced in federal court in Abingdon, Virginia to a term of 21 years imprisonment for being the leader of an OxyContin distribution ring, which operated in Lee County, Virginia from approximately 1996 through 2005. Ely, age 39, of Pennington Gap, Virginia had previously pled guilty to the charge of leading a continuing criminal enterprise. In addition to the term of imprisonment, Ely was also sentenced to five years supervised release following her imprisonment and was ordered to forfeit \$42,500 to the United States.

Also sentenced today were four of Ely's co-defendants, each of whom had previously pled guilty to charges of conspiracy to distribute oxycodone and distribution of oxycodone. Beverly Jane Benfield, age 41, was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment.

Kimberly Roop Homan, age 28, of Pennington Gap, Virginia was sentenced to serve 30 months. Leonard Brewer, age 35, was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Rebecca Wendling, age 34, was sentenced to 30 months.

Stacy Renee Homan Bishop, age 26, is scheduled for sentencing on August 29, 2007 at the federal courthouse in Big Stone Gap. Jerri Michelle Deskins, age 36, is scheduled to be sentenced in Abingdon on September 17, 2007. Jennifer Bryson, age 35, will be sentenced on October 19, 2007 in Big Stone Gap. The date for the sentencing of Jerry Stapleton, age 48, is still to be scheduled.

The defendants were charged on September 6, 2006 in a 27 count indictment, and in a superseding indictment on December 19, 2006. The indictment charged Ely with running a continuing criminal enterprise, an organization whose purpose was to distribute oxycodone. She was also charged with maintaining a residence for the purpose of distributing oxycodone and numerous counts of distribution. The indictment

charged all nine defendants with conspiracy to distribute oxycodone and various counts of distribution of oxycodone, resulting from controlled buys of oxycodone made at the Ely residence.

Ely began dealing in prescription painkillers as early as 1996, dealing primarily in OxyContin beginning around 1997, shortly after the drug came on the market. Initially, Ely obtained pills and took them to others who would sell the pills for her from their own residence. In approximately 2000, Ely allowed a number of her co-defendants to move into her house. In exchange for a small quantity of OxyContin for their personal use, cigarettes, and room and board, they helped Ely obtain and sell the pills. Between 2000 and 2005, Benfield, Bishop, Bryson, Homan, Wendling, Brewer, and Deskins all resided at the Ely residence for some period of time and each distributed OxyContin from the residence. The group supplied a steady stream of customers, frequently selling ten or more OxyContin tablets per day. The pills were obtained by Ely and the others from individuals in Ohio and from a number of local suppliers in Lee County, Virginia and nearby communities in Tennessee. Throughout the course of conspiracy, the group was responsible for putting thousands of OxyContin pills onto the streets of Lee County and neighboring areas.

The rise of Ely's organization corresponded to a rise in local property crimes in Lee County, Virginia. Along with the dramatic increase of oxycodone abuse following the release of OxyContin in 1996, the county suffered in increase in crimes such as shoplifting, breaking and entering and burglary offenses, and the passing of forged and stolen checks.

The charges were the result of a long-term investigation conducted by the Lee County Sheriff's Department, the Southwest Regional Drug Task Force, and the Bristol Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Bockhorst prosecuted the case.

– end –