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JEANERETTE MAN SENTENCED IN FEDERAL COURT FOR DRUG & FIREARMS CHARGES

Drug and firearm offender gets to spend next 51 years in federal prison

Lafayette, Louisiana . . . United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced that BERNARD ALLEN CHARLES, age 43, from Jeanerette, Louisiana was sentenced today in federal court to 51 years 8 months imprisonment to be followed by 10 years supervised release for possession with intent to distribute over 50 grams of cocaine base; possession of firearm by a convicted felon; possession of firearm equipped with a silencer in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime; possession of an unregistered silencer; and possession of a silencer lacking a serial number; and criminal forfeiture.

U.S. Attorney Washington stated, "Mr. Charles will spend most, if not all, of the rest of his life in a federal prison. We will remain aggressive in pursuing justice for criminals of this ilk. The tip of the spear of federal law enforcement remains steadfastly pointed at drug traffickers."

CHARLES was indicted in October 2003 following an investigation by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); the Broussard Police Department; the Lafayette City Marshal; and the Western District Narcotics office of the Louisiana State Police. A three-day trial in May 2005 ended with a federal jury convicting CHARLES on all seven counts of the indictment.

The sentence is the result of initial investigations by the Broussard Police Department into CHARLES' possession of controlled substances at a storage facility in Broussard in 2003. CHARLES was wanted on seven outstanding arrest warrants from Iberia Parish, Lafayette, and Broussard for failure to appear for traffic infractions. During investigations, a narcotics dog alerted to the exterior of a storage unit in Broussard, Louisiana. Officers learned that the unit was rented by CHARLES' wife. Aided by the Lafayette City Marshal's office, surveillance was initiated and the officers observed CHARLES at the storage unit and proceeded to arrest him for the outstanding warrants.

After observing questionable objects in the open storage unit, narcotics agents of the Louisiana State Police were contacted and assisted in obtaining a search warrant for the storage unit and CHARLES' vehicles. The agents located a total of 446 grams of cocaine base (crack cocaine), \$3,295 in U.S. Currency, and a S.W.D. M12 .380 caliber semiautomatic pistol and a homemade "silencer". Also stored in the storage unit was a 1999 Plymouth Prowler automobile.

CHARLES was convicted of felony possession of marijuana in 2000 in Orange, Texas. It is against state and federal law for a convicted felon to have possession of a firearm and/or ammunition.

This case was prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a nationwide program begun in 2001, and designed to reduce violence in our communities by aggressively using existing federal firearms laws. United States Attorneys, District Attorneys, Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and state officials have created partnerships to address crimes involving firearms. Generally, any arrest involving a firearm is reviewed immediately by local, state and federal authorities to decide whether the case is best suited for prosecution under state or federal law, or a combination of both. Project Safe Neighborhoods is expected to lead to longer prison terms for violent criminals, and a significant reduction in violent crime. To date, federal prosecutions under Project Safe Neighborhoods in the Western District of Louisiana have led to the incarceration of criminals responsible for violent crimes such as homicides, aggravated assaults, robbery, car jacking, burglary, and drug trafficking.

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. Here the statutes mandate a minimum statutory penalty of fifty (50) years confinement. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Brett L. Grayson.

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