



PRESS RELEASE
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**TWO TAMPA MEN PLEAD GUILTY TO SELLING FIREARMS AND
CRACK COCAINE IN PROGRESS VILLAGE, TAMPA**

Tampa, Florida - United States Attorney Paul I. Perez and Ralph C. Ostrowski, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives announced today that Claudius Clarke, age 28, and McJames Simmons, age 26, of Tampa, Florida, pleaded guilty to the following offenses: conspiracy to possess firearms and ammunition being a convicted felon; dealing in the sale of firearms without a federal license and possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense; conspiracy to distribute cocaine base; being a felon in possession of firearms and ammunition; selling firearms without a federal license; intent to distribute cocaine base and the use of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense. The defendants face a minimum of 10 years' imprisonment up to life imprisonment. A sentencing date has not yet been set.

According to the plea agreement, the defendants engaged in a wide ranging conspiracy to sell firearms and crack cocaine in Progress Village, Tampa, Florida, during the time period of November 2004 to May 2005. The defendants sold 11 firearms and crack cocaine to undercover agents during this sting operation. The crack cocaine sold to undercover agents exceeded 70 grams. The firearms, many of which were fully loaded

included a sniper rifle, assault rifle, and numerous semi-automatic pistols and revolvers.

This is another case prosecuted as a part the Department of Justice program “Project Safe Neighborhoods” - a nationwide gun violence reduction initiative with strong support from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). United States Attorney Paul I. Perez is coordinating the cooperative effort here in the Middle District of Florida with federal, state and local law enforcement officials. The objective is to reduce violent crime by locating and seizing unlawfully possessed guns and then swiftly prosecuting the offenders using both federal and state gun laws.

The case was investigated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, (ATF), the Narcotics Section of Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Michael E. Runyon.