



PRESS RELEASE

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“OPERATION SWEET TOOTH” - MAJOR NATIONWIDE ECSTASY AND MARIJUANA DRUG BUST HAS LARGE FLORIDA CONNECTION

U.S. Attorney Paul I. Perez, Mark R. Trouville, Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Ralph Ostrowski, Special Agent in Charge, Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), Carl Whitehead, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Michael E. Yasofsky, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Criminal Investigation, Sheriff Jim Coates, Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff John Rutherford, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, Lance Newman, Special Agent in Charge, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Chief Dorene Thomas, Pinellas Park Police Department, and Chief Chuck Harmon, St. Petersburg Police Department, announced today the unsealing of indictments charging 48 individuals with various federal narcotics and firearms violations including conspiracy to distribute cocaine, marijuana and ecstasy. Today in Tampa and Jacksonville, law enforcement agencies began arresting the individuals wanted on the federal charges. Also, in Orlando, five individuals were arrested on state drug charges filed by the Florida Attorney General's

Office of Statewide Prosecution. Throughout the nation and Canada thousands of law enforcement officers today began arresting 300 individuals and executed 58 search warrants in "Operation Sweet Tooth." Cities included in today's operation are; Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, San Jose (CA), Atlanta, Panama City, Mobile, Gulfport (MS), Dallas, Houston, Riverside (CA), Oakland (CA), Toronto, Montreal, Chicago, Los Angeles, Columbus (OH), Charlotte, Sacramento, San Diego, Seattle, San Antonio, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and Denver. This two-year operation has resulted in the seizure of more than 900,000 MDMA or ecstasy pills, 1,337 pounds of marihuana, and \$4.8 million in assets.

In early 2004 in Pinellas County and in Duval County separate investigations began with local law enforcement making undercover drug purchases from street level dealers. As these investigations expanded, local law enforcement agencies enlisted the assistance of state, federal and international agencies. The investigation revealed a multi-state and international loosely knit drug organization involved in the importation and distribution of cocaine, marihuana and ecstasy. Eventually DEA coordinated state, local, Canadian and Vietnamese law enforcement efforts to dismantle the organization.

In Pinellas County, the year long investigation resulted in the seizure of 29 kilograms of cocaine, 55,000 ecstasy pills, two pounds of methamphetamine and \$400,000 in cash. ATF also seized numerous firearms as well. Proceedings are underway to seize and forfeit numerous houses, vehicles and bank accounts of those indicted. Six separate indictments naming 29 defendants were returned by a federal grand jury on DATE and unsealed today.

In Jacksonville, 19 defendants have been named in a single federal indictment returned on November 16, 2005 and unsealed today. Three search warrants were

executed this morning. Those indicted are alleged to have distributed thousands of ecstasy pills and hundreds of pounds of Canadian marijuana on a monthly basis in the Jacksonville area. One of the defendants allegedly used his business as a distribution point. Proceedings are underway to seize and forfeit several residences and numerous luxury vehicles. During the course of the investigation, approximately 8,000 ecstasy pills and a significant amount of marijuana was also seized.

Nationwide this investigation is being led by DEA and here in Florida the following agencies participated: ATF, FBI, IRS, Florida Attorney General's Office of the Statewide Prosecutor, FDLE, North Florida High Intensity Drug Task Area (HIDTA) Task Force, the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, St. Petersburg Police Department, and the Pinellas Park Police Department. The Florida Violent Crime and Drug Control Council, which is coordinated by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, provided funding for the investigative costs for today's Operation Sweet Tooth. These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew Perry (Tampa) and D. Rodney Brown (Jacksonville).

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.