



Operation Sudden Impact
Joint Law Enforcement Press Release
For Immediate Release
Wednesday, May 15, 2013

Operation Sudden Impact Solves Six ‘Cold Case’ Murders and Leads to Charges Against Nearly 40 Montebello Gang Members and Associates

LOS ANGELES – A task force investigation into gang activities in the City of Montebello has resulted in a series of criminal cases being filed by state and federal prosecutors, including a federal racketeering indictment and charges related to six murders that were unsolved prior to the joint investigation called Operation Sudden Impact.

This morning, 10 defendants named in federal indictments and criminal charges filed in Los Angeles Superior Court were taken into custody by law enforcement authorities. Previously in the investigation, six defendants were charged by the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office in murder cases solved during this investigation. As a result of Operation Sudden Impact, a total of 38 gang members and their associates now have been charged by federal and state prosecutors.

The two-year investigation stems from a string of “cold case” murders that led law enforcement to the Southside Montebello criminal street gang and their local rivals. Ultimately, the investigation resulted in six state murder cases, including one charging a gang member who is accused of fatally shooting a man and his 12-year-old son in June 2008, and attempting to murder two other people, who were attending a party where a fight broke out between members of his gang and Southside Montebello.

Operation Sudden Impact was a multi-agency effort of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the Montebello Police Department; the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department; and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Special Services Unit. As a result of the investigation, personnel from these agencies, assisted by law enforcement officials from other state and federal agencies, this morning arrested a total of 10 individuals who were charged in the federal RICO case and other cases filed by the United States Attorney’s Office and the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office.

As part of this investigation, undercover law enforcement officers and confidential informants infiltrated the Southside Montebello gang and obtained evidence of the gang's alleged crimes, including murders and methamphetamine distribution. During the investigation, law enforcement officers observed approximately 20 controlled purchases of methamphetamine, drug deals that form the basis of the federal RICO case. These transactions led to law enforcement seizing nearly one pound of methamphetamine that allegedly was purchased from members and associates of the gang who are now charged in federal court.

Additionally, as alleged in the federal indictment, last November, two Southside Montebello gang members sold drugs and fully automatic firearms to an undercover operative in a transaction that also resulted in the seizure of a non-operational, rocket-propelled grenade launcher.

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey today pledged to continue working with law enforcement to keep Los Angeles County safe. "Today's arrests are the result of really good police work and collaboration among federal, state and local agencies. They represent a victory for law enforcement. But more importantly they represent a win for the residents of the City of Montebello and adjacent communities who have been terrorized by escalating gang violence," District Attorney Lacey said. "For the District Attorney's Office, it is important that Los Angeles County residents be safe in the communities in which they live and work. We are proud to be part of the team that is bringing home justice."

United States Attorney André Birotte Jr. stated: "As alleged in the RICO indictment, members of Southside Montebello gang established what they called a 'Killer Squad' unit within the gang to challenge their rivals. The federal racketeering indictment describes how the gang maintained an arsenal of weapons, engaged in violent acts, and operated a robust drug trade that frightened and intimidated the people of Montebello. The United States Attorney's Office is committed to working with District Attorney Jackie Lacey, and our partners at agencies like the ATF and the Montebello Police Department, to protecting the public by dismantling the street gangs that are the root cause of so much crime and violence in our local communities."

Steven J. Bogdalek, special agent in charge of the ATF's Los Angeles Field Division, commented: "ATF's primary mission is to combat violent crime, and we achieve that goal by partnering with state and local law enforcement agencies like the Montebello Police Department. During Operation Sudden Impact, ATF and the Montebello Police department took approximately 40 violent criminal street gang members off the street, along with 20 illegal firearms that will no longer be a threat to the community."

Montebello Police Chief Kevin L McClure said: "These arrests will make a significant impact on a Montebello street gang that has not only terrorized the City of Montebello, but also the surrounding

communities. This was an extraordinary investigative effort by all the members of the Montebello Police Department and our partners. This investigation would not have been possible without the help and partnership of the ATF, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and the Department of Corrections."

As a result of Operation Sudden Impact, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has filed four homicide cases that charged six Montebello-based gang members. Those cases involve:

- Joe John Dorantes, 27 (dob 10/01/85), a gang member is accused of fatally shooting a man and his 12-year-old son – Albert and Juan Garcia – in June 2008 and attempting to murder two other people. The shooting victims were at a graduation party where Southside Montebello gang members engaged members of a rival gang in a fist fight. The rival gangsters fled, but soon returned with firearms, shooting inside the party killing the father and son. Dorantes is charged in case BA405435 with two counts each of murder and attempted murder. The criminal complaint filed in December includes a special circumstance allegation that the defendant murdered the victims to further the activities of a criminal street gang. If convicted, Dorantes faces a maximum sentence of life in prison without parole or the death penalty. The District Attorney's Office will not decide on seeking the death penalty until the case moves closer to trial. Dorantes is scheduled to be in the Los Angeles County Superior Court, Criminal Justice Center, Department 30, on May 22 for a preliminary hearing setting.
- Jimmy Valenzuela, 27 (dob 9/15/85), who is a founding member of the "Killer Squad" clique, is accused in the execution-style slayings of two rival gang members in 2007 and 2010. Valenzuela is charged in case BA398681, which was filed in June 2012, with two counts of murder, with the special circumstance allegation of multiple murders. If convicted, Valenzuela faces a maximum sentence of life in prison without parole or the death penalty. The District Attorney's Office will not decide on seeking the death penalty until the case moves closer to trial. Valenzuela is scheduled to be in the Los Angeles County Superior Court, Criminal Justice Center, Department 30, on May 22 for a preliminary hearing setting.
- Roger Gutierrez, 20 (dob 8/5/1992); and Ernest Miachel Ortiz, 23 (dob 9/17/89); and Rudy Leonardo Escarcega, 21 (dob 6/26/91); all alleged gang members, were charged last month with the 2010 killing of a rival gang member at Reggie Rodriguez Park in Montebello. The men are charged in BA409950 with one count of murder with gang allegations. If convicted as charged, the men face a maximum sentence of 50 years to life in state prison. All three defendants are in state prison on unrelated cases and will be arraigned in this murder case at a later time.
- Southside Montebello gang member Edward James Dewey, 26 (dob 8/21/86), pleaded no contest to voluntary manslaughter and assault with a deadly weapon in October 2012 in connection with the shooting death of a man. Dewey, who was charged in BA388628, was sentenced in January to 39 years in state prison.

In addition to the murder cases, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office during the course of the investigation filed cases against 14 defendants on charges ranging from narcotics sales, to sale of an assault weapon to being a felon in possession of a gun. Seven of those 14 defendants were previously taken into custody. Four of those defendants were arrested this morning. Those arrested this morning are:

- Tirzo Cangas, 26, of Montebello;
- Edgar Solorzano, 32, of Montebello;
- Oscar Garcia, 35, of Montebello; and
- Michael Candelaria, 23, of Montebello.

Authorities are currently seeking three fugitives who have been charged in state court. (Three additional persons not included in the figure of 38 defendants charged were arrested this morning and may be charged by the District Attorney's office.)

Federal prosecutors have charged a total of 18 defendants in four indictments. The main, 68-page federal indictment charges 13 defendants, nine of whom are charged with violating the RICO statute. The 24-count indictment also alleges federal narcotics and weapons offenses. Those named in the racketeering indictment are all alleged members or associates of Southside Montebello. Six of those named in the racketeering indictment were arrested this morning. They are:

- Samuel Lopez, 28, of Diamond Bar;
- Joseph Elizarraras, 33, of Pico Rivera;
- Jolene Montoya, 24, of Montebello;
- Carlos Hernandez, 47, of Montebello;
- Armando Alvarado, 59, of Montebello;
- Davit Babayan, 26, of Whittier; and

Three of the RICO defendants are fugitives who are currently being sought. Those fugitives are:

- Julian Merrit, 45, of Monterey Park;
- Lena Doktorczyk, 50, of Pico Rivera; and
- Lena Doktorczyk, 50, of Pico Rivera;

Four of the defendants named in the RICO indictment were already in custody. They are:

- George Vera Sr., of Montebello;
- Robert Holguin, of Montebello;
- Karina Valdez, of Montebello; and
- Marla Vera, of Montebello.

All 13 defendants charged in the RICO indictment face a statutory maximum sentence of life in federal prison if they are convicted.

Two other defendants are charged by themselves in indictments recently returned by a federal grand jury, which brings to 15 the total number of defendants charged by the United States Attorney's Office. Davit Babayan, an associate of Southside Montebello, is charged with three counts of illegal possession of fully automatic weapons (each count carries a statutory maximum penalty of 10 years

in prison). Shant Karibloghossian, an alleged gang member, is charged with distribution of methamphetamine and faces a potential sentence of life in federal prison if he is convicted.

Three other defendants charged in federal court as a result of Operation Sudden Impact were convicted last month.

Charging documents filed by prosecutors contain allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.

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