

12 indicted in \$24M coke operation

This time, the lure of the drug 'trapped' pushers — in FBI's net

by **Jim Smith**

Daily News Staff Writer

The idea behind the sting was to lure major drug wholesalers into an escape-proof trap.

It worked so well that more than 100 drug traffickers and a top Colombian cartel cell leader fell into the net.

FBI agents and New Jersey state troopers went undercover in 1990, opening a business in South Jersey that supplied automobiles with hidden compartments, perfect for smuggling, and mobile cellular phones for busy interstate entrepreneurs caught in traffic.

You couldn't find the new firm in the Yellow Pages. Word of mouth was all the advertising needed.

And the word spread, even as far as a federal prison in Kentucky, where Cristobal Paz, of Philadelphia, a Cuban refugee, was winding up a 10-year hitch for drug trafficking, officials say.

Shortly after Paz was paroled, he sought out the firm's services.

Paz got back in the drug trade big

time, he has since admitted, according to court records.

He didn't know it at the time, but the mobile cellular phone his new friends provided was bugged for 90 days with court authorization. The agents even made videos of some meetings.

One intended victim, a co-conspirator, was "on his way to becoming a skull," Paz was told in Spanish by his alleged main cocaine supplier, Jose Gonzalez-Rivera, a Colombian national and reputed leader of a Medellin, Colombia, cocaine cartel cell based in New York City.

Paz, 34, of A Street near Potter, and Rivera, 47, of the Bronx, N.Y., now have big trouble. Both have been in jail since last fall.

They and 10 associates have been indicted by a federal grand jury in Philadelphia on charges of conspiring to sell at least 700 pounds of cocaine, worth \$6 million on the wholesale market, and \$24 million on the street.

"This is the first time in this district that we have brought an indictment against a [cartel] cell leader," said U.S. Attorney Michael M. Baylson, the area's top federal prosecutor, referring to Rivera.

He spoke yesterday at a press conference after the indictment, filed Friday, was unsealed.

More than 100 other drug dealers are expected to be charged in the coming months as a result of the sting, predicted one source familiar with the investigation.

Undercover agents paid \$21,000 on two occasions to buy 2.2 pounds of

cocaine from Paz and his right-hand man, co-defendant Theodore "Papo" Santiago, 26, of Martha Street near Seltzer, prosecutors said.

Like Paz, Santiago also has confessed, according to court records.

Paz also gave the agents an additional five kilograms to sell on credit, at \$19,500 per kilogram, but the agents never paid him the money, according to Assistant U.S. Attorneys Carlos A. Martir Jr. and Thomas Sudath, the case prosecutors.

According to the indictment, Rivera supplied Paz and Santiago last year with more than 150 kilograms of cocaine for sale in Philadelphia and elsewhere.

Paz also got cocaine from other sources, including more than 120 kilograms from co-defendant Santiago Gonzalez, 44, of Coral Gables, Fla., another Cuban refugee, the grand jury said.

Gonzalez and co-defendant Joaquin Morgado, 42, of Bensalem, Bucks County, another native of Cuba, were arrested Nov. 8 in the parking lot of the Comfort Inn Hotel on Delaware Avenue in Philadelphia, where they allegedly had come to collect the \$97,500 drug debt owed by the undercover agents.

Other co-defendants charged in the conspiracy are Diego Jesus Ortega, 46, and his nephew, Diego Mauricio Lopez Ortega, both of Queens, N.Y.; Rivera's girlfriend, Maria Rodriguez, 31, of the Bronx; Melba Quintero, 44, of New York City; Elsa T. Cruz, 44, of North Bergen, N.J.; Jose Cruz, 33, of the Bronx; and Jose A. Rosario, 28, of Franklin Street near Somerset, Philadelphia.

You
need
DAILY NEWS
CLASSIFIED
563-5000

12 Indicted in \$24M Coke Operation Daily News - 2/11/1992

Clipped By:



jerriwilliamsauthor
Wed, Oct 3, 2018