

FBI seizes nearly 2 tons of cocaine; 11 arrested

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Despite the arrest and surrender of several high-ranking Cali drug cartel leaders in Colombia, cocaine is still pouring into South Florida — by the ton.

The proof came Thursday when the FBI announced it had intercepted nearly 2 tons of the powder worth \$33 million.

All of it had a Cali connection, agents said. In a bizarre twist, agents added, among 11 suspects arrested were two stepchildren of government informant Max Mermelstein — once a top U.S. distributor for the rival Medellin cartel, a witness against Manuel Noriega and author of a book called *The Man Who Made It Snow*.

“To the best of our knowledge, there is no relationship between Max Mermelstein and this case other than the fact that his stepchildren have been charged as key figures in this operation,” said FBI spokesman Paul Miller. “His whereabouts are unknown to us.”

Authorities showed off the seized contraband at a U.S. Customs Service warehouse at the Port of Miami. It arrived, they said, in nine steel cylinders, each 10 feet long and 2½

feet in diameter. They declined to say whether the cocaine actually had entered the country through the port.

“For us, this is a significant seizure,” said Paul R. Philip, the FBI’s special agent in charge in Miami. “We have almost 2 tons of cocaine and major players off the street. So we think this is going to have a significant impact.”

Other agents said the smuggling organization — which they said is linked with Cali figure Pacho Herrera — had been funneling large loads of cocaine through South Florida every four to six weeks during the past year. It all came to an end Wednesday when the FBI, Miami police and Florida Highway Patrol arrested 11 people.

Authorities allege that Mario Hernando Emura-Jaramillo, 31, identified as a Mermelstein stepson, was the “U.S.-based organizer” of the cocaine imports and a money-laundering conspiracy.

A Mermelstein stepdaughter, Olga Luz Arango, 47, allegedly laundered cocaine profits for the group, court papers say.

Julio Correa-Valdes, 39, is alleged to be the organization’s leader, who is accused of procuring the cocaine and arrang-

ing its delivery to the United States. He remains a fugitive.

Most of the defendants have appeared before a federal magistrate in Miami and await further hearings. Court papers indicate that they lived well but were not so ostentatious that they attracted attention.

For example, Emura-Jaramillo and a girlfriend, Sandra Londono, lived in a tony Miami Beach condominium with contoured railings on the balconies. Most of the condos — priced between \$150,000 and \$350,000 — command views of the Atlantic Ocean. But their names did not appear on any of the building’s directories or mailboxes.

Correa-Valdes maintained a residence in Parkland, an upscale community in North Broward.

One defendant who authorities said tried to get away lived at Oceania Towers in North Miami Beach. Now, Camilo Miguel Berrios, who also went by the last name of Carrington, is spending his nights at South Shore Hospital. When agents arrived at his apartment Wednesday to arrest him, he jumped from a 15th-story balcony to the floor below, breaking a leg.