

Raid in hills above Cupertino yields pot plants worth \$56 million

http://www.mercurynews.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?arti

Bay City News Service
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Law enforcement officers pulled an estimated \$56 million worth of marijuana plants from a garden today in unincorporated Santa Clara County as part of what has been a record year for seizures.

A helicopter lowered Santa Clara County sheriff's deputies, California Department of Fish and Game officers and U.S. Department of Justice officers into a steep ravine in the hills above Cupertino where they began chopping down more than 14,000 plants in several gardens.

Law enforcement filled a trailer with mature plants ranging from a few feet to 12 feet tall as they were brought in by helicopter in bunches.

Concerns for the safety of officers and the environment are among the top priorities in an operation like this, according to sheriff's Sgt. Ed Wise.

"The deputies that work those gardens have to be safe," Wise said. "They set up a perimeter."

In the past, law enforcement has come under fire during similar operations. The officers were fully armed.

The environment also pays a price for these gardens as growers use pesticides, poison and fertilizer. Many of the gardens are on public land and growers use natural creeks and pools to irrigate the gardens, according to California Department of Fish and Game patrol Lt. John Nores.

Nores said illegal poaching of deer and other animals and the poisoning of fish and other wildlife are common at these sites.

"These two creeks are polluted, at least for this year," Nores said. The gardens "are extremely dangerous to the resources of the county."

Nores said the growers were mixing chemicals directly into the water source, which they then run down to the plants through tubing, which subsequently ends up in the watershed.

Officers found five campsites with two kitchens stocked with fresh tomatoes, tortillas and cheese. They also found sleeping setups, tables and fresh clothes.

One officer said they found fresh footprints leading away from the site.

Arrests are rare in gardens as the growers usually have escape routes worked out and hear the police activity, Wise said.

Today's seizure will be added to more than 150,000 plants already cut down this year in Santa Clara County, a record for the county, Wise said. The state has also seen record numbers with more than 2 million plants seized.

Wise attributed the increased seizures to an increased effort on behalf of law enforcement. The garden was spotted by an aerial survey and confirmed by officers on foot.

Three San Mateo pot distribution centers raided

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/08/30/BAD8RS2A0.DTL&typ>

John Cote, Chronicle Staff Writer

Thursday, August 30, 2007

(08-29) 18:38 PDT San Mateo -- Federal agents and local police on Wednesday raided three locations in San Mateo that authorities described as "marijuana distribution centers."

Agents seized 50 pounds of processed marijuana, hash, marijuana-laced food and about \$30,000 in cash, according to a Drug Enforcement Administration statement.

The DEA referred to the operations as "drug trafficking organizations," but it was unclear whether they had ties to medical marijuana clubs.

California approved medical use of marijuana more than a decade ago, but it is still illegal under federal law. Medical marijuana club operators and pot growers, some with dubious ties to state-sanctioned medical marijuana practices, are subject to federal arrests, seizures and prosecution.

Documents relating to the San Mateo investigations are under court seal. A San Mateo police spokesman refused to comment on the case, referring questions to the DEA, which did not return a phone call or respond to an e-mail.

The San Mateo raids were the result of a nine-month investigation that included the DEA and the San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force, a multi-agency unit.

Property owners where the San Mateo marijuana distribution centers conducted business may have their assets seized and face criminal prosecution if further violations occur, according to the DEA statement.

E-mail John Cote at jcote@sfchronicle.com

San Mateo pot shops raided

Three medical cannabis dispensaries shuttered in joint action by DEA and local police

http://www.insidebayarea.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?ar

By Michael Manekin, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

Article Last Updated:08/30/2007 07:00:10 AM PDT

SAN MATEO — In the largest Bay Area raid of medical marijuana dispensaries in nearly a year, federal agents stormed three medical cannabis outlets in downtown San Mateo on Wednesday afternoon and shut them down.

The DEA, accompanied by members of the San Mateo County Narcotics Task Force and the San Mateo Police Department, seized 50 pounds of processed marijuana, hashish, cannabis-laced edibles and approximately

\$30,000 in cash, according to a statement by the U.S. Department of Justice. No arrests were reported.

The raids occurred in the middle of the afternoon, and the three dispensaries were located in busy, commercial districts of the city — including one site in an office building in the city's commercial center on Third Avenue. "A bunch of guys with drawn guns dropped

into the building and bashed the door down, shock-and-awe style," said Josh Snyder, an employee of an Internet startup in the Third Avenue office building.

A DEA spokesperson refused to identify the dispensaries, and the search warrants issued for the raids remain under seal, but the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws lists on its Web site three San Mateo dispensaries: Patients Choice Resource Cooperative, at 164 South Blvd.; Peninsula Patients Local Option, at 397 S. Claremont St.; and MHT, at 60 E. Third Ave.

All three dispensaries were reportedly raided, according to Kris Hermes of Americans for Safe Access, an Oakland-based medical marijuana advocacy group. A fourth dispensary named Holistic Solutions closed voluntarily as a result of the raids, he said.

Federal agents did not say whether the raided dispensaries had violated the state's medical marijuana laws. However, they were all "in violation of federal law," said Cmdr. Mark Wyss of the county's Narcotics Task Force.

The use of medical marijuana with the recommendation of a doctor is legal in California under Proposition 215, passed by state voters in 1996. In San Mateo County, 66 percent voted in favor of the measure.

However, federal law prohibits the possession of cannabis, and the city of San Mateo does not have local regulations pertaining to the distribution of medical marijuana.

According to NORML, which only lists dispensaries compliant with state and local marijuana laws on its Web site, the raided dispensaries had not violated state law.

Medical marijuana advocates and law enforcement officials said that the raids essentially wiped out the county's medical marijuana dispensaries.

"Of course, that's going to impact access for the patients who live in San Mateo and surrounding areas," said Hermes. "You're talking about the vast majority or all of the facilities in a particular region."

That the DEA would devastate one county's supply of medical marijuana is not "unprecedented," Hermes said. Last year, federal agents raided two dispensaries in Stanislaus County, which essentially cut off patients' access in that region.

"The federal government has been coming in and undermining the state's medical marijuana law," Hermes said. "There is an unrelenting amount of harassment currently going on by the federal government."

Hermes called the DEA's collaboration with San Mateo police and Narcotics Task Force "very distressing."

San Mateo City Councilman Brandt Grotte said that he was not aware that local police were working with federal agents on a nine-month investigation of the city's medical marijuana dispensaries.

"If it turns out that the activities that were being undertaken (at the dispensaries) were in compliance with the state law, then I would prefer that police were not involved locally, aside from being informed the raids were occurring.

"I have a lot of compassion for people who are suffering," said Grotte. "If they're in cancer treatment or something like that, I honestly believe that (marijuana) can have therapeutic value."

Outside the shuttered dispensaries in San Mateo on Wednesday afternoon, that seemed to be the prevailing view among the eyewitnesses to the raids.

Michael Gilbert was standing across the street from the Patients Choice Resource Cooperative when "the DEA just came down like a ton of bricks," he said — an operation he emphatically disagreed with.

"I don't smoke dope," said Gilbert, "but that's what I think."

"Oh, man, that's not dope — that's medical marijuana," said Glenn Owens, the owner of a lawn-mower repair shop next to the dispensary. "There are people who actually use it for medical purposes — and to deny them that is wrong."

Jason Marshalla, a 19-year-old college student from Mountain View, was one of a handful of patients who attempted to stop by the Peninsula Patients Local Option on South Claremont Street late Wednesday afternoon.

Standing outside the shuttered dispensary, he said he smokes medical marijuana to treat his Attention Deficit Disorder — a treatment which helps him do his homework better, he said. His aunt, he said, takes THC pills (a distillation of the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana) to treat her cancer, and a friend's mom uses marijuana to ease her arthritis.

Marshalla traveled all the way from Mountain View to San Mateo, he said, because the city harbors the closest dispensaries to his home in the South Bay.

Now, he said, he would have to travel to Hayward, the next-closest location — a prospect he called "inconvenient."

"Now, I have to go really far to get it," he said. "It's probably going to be the same now for a lot of people."

The last large-scale raids of Bay Area medical marijuana dispensaries by the DEA came in October 2006, when federal agents stormed about a half-dozen locations in San

Francisco and Oakland, seizing about 13,000 plants and arresting 15 people.

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20,000 Pot Plants Found In Cupertino

<http://www.kesq.com/global/story.asp?s=7001208&ClientType=Printable>

Associated Press - August 29, 2007 6:34 PM ET

CUPERTINO, Calif. (AP) - Santa Clara County authorities conducted a marijuana raid this morning in an unincorporated area of Cupertino and discovered thousands of pot plants.

Members of the Special Operations Division Marijuana Enforcement Team found 20,000 marijuana plants growing on a parcel of land adjacent to mid-peninsula property.

Authorities say the pot will either be burned or buried.

Pot Plants Worth \$56 Million Found In Cupertino

<http://www.nbc11.com/news/14004688/detail.html>

POSTED: 11:11 am PDT August 29, 2007
UPDATED: 4:30 pm PDT August 29, 2007

Officers with the Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department conducted a marijuana raid Tuesday morning in unincorporated Cupertino.

Members of the Special Operations Division Marijuana Enforcement Team found 14,000 marijuana plants growing on a parcel of land adjacent to mid-peninsula property, NBC11 reported.

The plants were some 10 feet long, which is considered large, according to sheriff's Sgt. Ed Wise. According to NBC11's Damian Trujillo, the plants are worth \$56 million. Officers told Trujillo each plant is worth \$4,000.

The address of the bust is 18101 Monte Cello Road off of Stevens Canyon Road.

Chopper11 flew over the heavily wooded area.

A truck was parked on a concrete pad outside a large structure. It was filled with marijuana plants.

The pot will either be burned or buried, Wise said.

In the past, law enforcement has come under fire during similar operations. The officers were fully armed.

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The environment also pays a price for these gardens as growers use pesticides, poison and fertilizer. Many of the gardens are on public land and growers use natural creeks and pools to irrigate the gardens, according to California Department of Fish and Game patrol Lt. John Nores. Nores said illegal poaching of deer and other animals and the poisoning of fish and other wildlife are common at these sites.

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News Briefs

08/30/07 04:49:55

http://www.insidebayarea.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?ar

\$18.2m pot garden seized

More than 4,000 marijuana plants were found Tuesday at two gardens in the Springville area.

Authorities pulled 4,554 plants from U.S. Forest Service land near Coffee Creek and Tule Creek, according to the Tulare County Sheriff's Department.

The value of the plants, if they were allowed to fully grow, was estimated at \$18.2 million.

Marijuana distributor sentenced to 14 years Oscar Rosales was convicted as the leader of a Fresno pot ring after record-setting bust.

<http://www.fresnobee.com/263/v-printerfriendly/story/124222.html>

By John Ellis / The Fresno Bee

08/29/07 05:02:07

Oscar Rosales, leader of a Fresno-based marijuana distribution operation that sent the drug across the nation, was sentenced Tuesday to more than 14 years in federal prison.

The operation was the largest ever busted by federal agents in the Fresno region of California's Eastern judicial district, prosecutors said. For that reason, they had sought an even longer prison term for Rosales.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Karen Escobar asked for more than 15 1/2 years "based on the magnitude of this drug enterprise."

The sentence imposed by U.S. District Judge Oliver W. Wanger was nevertheless twice as long as the sentences already handed down to others convicted in connection with Rosales' drug operation.

Rosales, 41, owner of Exclusive Sounds, a stereo business at 4376 W. Shaw Ave., expanded his small drug operation into a major distribution ring over the span of a decade, authorities said.

He used several couriers to distribute millions of dollars worth of marijuana throughout California and in Arkansas, Georgia, Minnesota and Tennessee. Its breakup led to four federal indictments and about 50 arrests.

Among those ensnared were Reuben Houston, a Georgia Tech football player who later tried out for the National Football League; Richard Renteria, co-owner of Accent Interiors in downtown Fresno; and North Fork resident William Joshua White, who was arrested at Clovis Community Medical Center, where his wife had just given birth to a premature child.

Rosales, who has been held in Fresno County Jail since his May 2005 arrest, pleaded guilty last September to being the primary distributor of 2,200 pounds of marijuana.

Defense attorneys argued for less time -- a mandatory 10-year sentence -- saying a manic-depressive disorder led to a drug habit that forced Rosales to deal marijuana.

During the sentencing hearing, defense attorneys put a psychiatrist on the stand who said Rosales was addicted to the adrenaline rush of dealing and had to deal drugs to support his habit.

Escobar scoffed at that reasoning. "It was simply the lure of easy money," she said. "Nothing more."

Wanger rejected the defense's argument, as well as another that Rosales wouldn't receive adequate treatment in prison for his ailment.

Defense attorneys also said Rosales had made attempts to cooperate with authorities -- which were summarily rejected -- and was a benefactor who supported civic causes.

Rosales cited that when he asked Wanger for mercy. "I have the ability to be a difference-maker in this community," he said.

Wanger acknowledged Rosales' community contributions but also referred to him as the "kingpin" of the marijuana-distribution operation and someone who "devoted energy to the criminal enterprise."

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San Carlos drug dealer gets 14 years in prison

http://www.insidebayarea.com/portlet/article/html/fragments/print_article.jsp?ar

By Josh Richman, STAFF WRITER
Inside Bay Area

Article Last Updated:

A San Carlos man has been sentenced to 14 years in federal prison after acknowledging he'd distributed more than 58 pounds of methamphetamine and 66 kilograms of cocaine.

Rafael Ramirez, 38, was among 18 people in this case who were indicted by a federal grand jury in May 2006; he pleaded guilty in March to possession with intent to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. He was sentenced Monday by U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel in San Francisco; the charge carried a 10-year mandatory minimum prison term.

Federal prosecutors say the investigation began after a defendant in Texas told authorities that in 2003 he had delivered 50 pounds of methamphetamine to Ramirez — "one of the managers of a major drug distribution network," according to one court document — in San Francisco.

Court-ordered wiretaps led to the seizure of more than 42 pounds of methamphetamine; about 52 kilograms of cocaine; 12 firearms, including three assault rifles; more than \$1.4 million in cash; 177 marijuana plants; five cars and one motorcycle throughout the Bay Area and at sites in Southern California and Hawaii.

In pleading guilty, Ramirez admitted to a \$187,000 deal for 22 pounds of methamphetamine with codefendant Kasi Pohahau of Redwood City; Pohahau was sentenced July 2 to 15 years and eight months in federal prison.

In exchange for his guilty plea, the government agreed not to use Ramirez's prior drug conviction as a sentencing enhancement in this case.

Defense attorney Mary McNamara had argued a 14-year term "imposes an extremely severe punishment for a man like Mr. Ramirez, who, unlike many of his co-defendants, is a middle class family man with two very young children, a history of employment, a loving and devoted family and broad support in his local community."

"While there is no doubt that Mr. Ramirez and Mr. Ramirez alone bears the responsibility

for his conduct, it is also true that he was motivated not by individual greed, but by the drive to provide for his growing family," McNamara wrote in her sentencing brief.

Other defendants already sentenced in this case include Linin Bin Suleiman, sentenced June 25 to five years and 10 months, and Rimoni Sailele, sentenced July 23 to four years and nine months; each had pleaded guilty to a count of possession with intent to distribute and distribution of cocaine.

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