



# Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department.

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Date: November 12, 2009  
Time: 12:30pm

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## News Release

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### **Detectives Arrest 17 People For Drug Trafficking** **Search continues for four more suspects and possible homicide victim**

**Santa Barbara**—The Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department Narcotics Bureau has concluded a six month long investigation of a missing person which tied into a marijuana cultivation operation in the pristine hills of Santa Barbara County inside the Los Padres National Forest.

During the case, narcotics detectives identified an outdoor marijuana garden being maintained in the rural foothills off of West Camino Cielo Rd. In addition, detectives identified several Mexican National suspects maintaining and operating the marijuana grow. As the investigation continued, detectives identified two residences in the East Los Angeles /Glendale area associated with the suspects.

On September 11, 2009, while detectives were conducting surveillance on the marijuana garden, two associated vehicles were seen leaving the garden. Detectives followed the vehicles into Ventura County where they coordinated traffic stops on the vehicles with the assistance of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department. During the traffic stops, five Mexican National suspects were taken into custody and found to be in possession of approximately 41 lbs of processed marijuana and a loaded semi-automatic handgun. They were all arrested for a violation of 182 PC - Conspiracy, 11358 H&S - Cultivation of marijuana, and 11359 H&S - Possession of marijuana for sale. In addition, one of the suspects was charged with a violation of 12031 PC - Carrying a firearm in the commission of a felony.

On September 12, 2009, members of the Santa Barbara Sheriff Narcotics Bureau and the Glendale Police Department Narcotic Enforcement Team served two search warrants in the East Los Angeles area. While conducting surveillance on the residences prior to serving the search warrants, Glendale PD detectives attempted to stop a vehicle seen leaving the residence. During the traffic stop, a 15-year

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old male, who was driving the vehicle, began ramming the police cars. The juvenile was quickly taken into custody for a violation of 245 PC - Assault with a deadly weapon on a peace officer. After taking him into custody, detectives served the search warrants on the residences that were next door to each other. During the service of the search warrants, detectives arrested an adult female running out of the rear of one of the residences carrying a kilo of cocaine. In addition, detectives arrested another adult male trying to flush a large amount of marijuana down the toilet in the second residence. In total, detectives arrested 3 adults and 1 juvenile. During the search of the residences, detectives seized approximately 71 lbs of processed marijuana, a kilo of cocaine and four semi-automatic handguns.

During the investigation, detectives have learned that the missing person, identified as Jesus Omar Villa of Fresno CA, was helping maintain the marijuana grow when he died. Although details surrounding his death are unclear, detectives believe it may have been the result of a homicide. In addition, detectives have learned that the body of Villa has been buried in an unknown location in the rural mountains above Santa Barbara.

On September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009, member of the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Narcotic Bureau and Santa Barbara Sheriff's Volunteer Search and Rescue Team entered and eradicated the marijuana garden off of W. Camino Cielo Road in the foothills of Santa Barbara. A large majority of the estimated 5,000 plant marijuana operation had already been harvested; however detectives destroyed over 200 growing marijuana plants. Several pesticides and herbicides, a large amount of trash, and camping gear were recovered from the grow site. Members of the Sheriff's Search and Rescue Team conducted a thorough search of the area utilizing specially trained cadaver dogs but were unable to locate Villa's body. In addition, Sheriff's detectives have gained information the suspected growers were collaborating to ignite a brush fire in the area to burn any remaining evidence associated with the marijuana grow and the location of the body of Jesus Omar Villa.

The case reached near conclusion on Thursday October 8, 2009, with the service of five search warrants in four counties outside of Santa Barbara County, including, Fresno, Tulare, San Luis Obispo and Los Angeles Counties. On that Thursday, authorities arrested seven subjects, seized approximately 205 pounds of marijuana worth a value of \$615,000, a ½ ounce of cocaine and two loaded semi-automatic handguns. Assisting in the search warrants were the Fresno County Sheriff's Department, Orange Cove Police Department, Tulare County Sheriff's Department, DEA, San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department and the Glendale Police Department. All of the suspects were booked into the County Jail in the respective counties in which they were arrested, pending prosecution.

In total, 15 adults and two juveniles associated with the drug trafficking organization have been taken into custody for a variety of charges. Approximately 350 lbs of marijuana has been seized with a street value of \$1,000,000 and over a kilo of cocaine with a street value of approximately \$105,000 dollars. In addition, 11 guns have been seized as well as \$39,000 in cash. Four suspects are still outstanding and all have \$250,000 warrants for their arrest.

The investigation is on-going, however detectives are getting very limited cooperation from the suspects they have in custody and the body of Villa may never be found. Detectives are confident that, if Villa's body is located and it is determined that his death is the result of a homicide, they have their suspect in custody.

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