

\$5.4 million in meth at heart of indictment

(KAIR)--Three Atchison residents are among ten from across the local region indicted on what federal authorities are calling a \$5.4 million methamphetamine conspiracy.

Atchison County Sheriff Jack Laurie tells MSC News the indictments came as the result of a local case involving a large quantity of methamphetamine. "This stems back from an instance in late March where the narcotics deputy had arrested Charlsie Harris and found her in possession of about 56 grams of methamphetamine. We were able to figure out, and track down, where the narcotics were coming from...later on he was able to tie in Eric and Linda Ballard with the same group...they were all coming from the same source...this is where this indictment, on our side, stemmed from."

Along with the Atchison trio, Tom Larson, Acting United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, says Missouri residents, including a pair from Saint Joseph, are charged in a five-count indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury on November 16.

The defendants named in a release from Larson's office are: Michaela Joanne Hernandez, 36, of Raymore, Mo., Brandy Michael Morgan, 44, of Kansas City, Mo., Anthony Dewayne Fifer, 46, of Mexico, Mo., Sharmyn Leanne Shryock, 27, and Jeffery Allen Jennings, 31, both of St. Joseph, Mo., Charlsie Kim Harris, 33, Eric Edward Ballard, 25, and Linda Kay Ballard, 65, all of Atchison, Kan., Brian Joe Russell, 36, of Amazonia, Mo., and Adrian Leon Madrigal, 27, address unknown,

The federal indictment, unsealed following the arrests and initial court appearances of some of the defendants, alleges that all ten participated in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine from Jan. 1, 2015, to Nov. 16, 2017. The indictment alleges the distribution of more than 321 kilograms of methamphetamine during the conspiracy. Five of the co-defendants are also charged together in one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering in connection with the drug-trafficking conspiracy.

In addition to the conspiracy counts, Hernandez is charged with one count of possessing methamphetamine with the intent to distribute, one count of possessing firearms in furtherance of a drug-trafficking crime, and one count of being a felon in possession of firearms and ammunition. Hernandez allegedly was in possession of a Springfield Armory 9mm handgun and a loaded Taurus 9mm handgun between April 1 and Oct. 14, 2017.

Under federal law, it is illegal for anyone who has been convicted of a felony to be

in possession of any firearm or ammunition. Hernandez has a prior felony conviction for possession of a controlled substance.

The indictment also contains a forfeiture allegation, which would require all 10 co-defendants to forfeit to the government any property derived from the proceeds of the alleged drug-trafficking conspiracy, including a money judgment of \$5.4 million. This represents the amount of money received in exchange for the unlawful distribution of methamphetamine, the indictment says, based on an approximate sale price of \$600 per ounce and distribution of at least 9,000 ounces (approximately 321.4 kilograms) of methamphetamine.

According to an affidavit filed in the original criminal complaint, law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at Hernandez's prior residence in Grandview, Mo., on April 5, 2017. Hernandez was arrested and officers seized approximately 1.46 kilograms of methamphetamine, the Springfield Armory 9mm handgun and drug paraphernalia. Hernandez allegedly told officers she distributed approximately 200 pounds of methamphetamine per month during the three to six months prior to her arrest.

On Oct. 14, 2017, law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at Hernandez's Raymore residence. Hernandez was arrested and officers seized approximately 228 grams of methamphetamine, the loaded Taurus 9mm handgun and drug paraphernalia. According to the affidavit, Hernandez told investigators that she pays between \$4,700 and \$6,500 per pound of methamphetamine. Hernandez allegedly stated she resupplies with the pound quantities approximately every four days.

Larson cautioned that the charges contained in this indictment are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Bruce Rhoades. It was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Plattsburg, Mo., Police Department; the Atchison County, Kan., Sheriff's Department; the Buchanan County Drug Strike Force and Sheriff's Department; the Jackson County Drug Task Force; the Clinton County, Mo., Sheriff's Department; the Missouri State Highway Patrol; the Cass County, Mo., Sheriff's Department; and the Clay County Drug Task Force.

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