

## 31 Indicted In Middle Tennessee Drug Ring

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Agents from 60 law enforcement agencies dismantled a drug operation with links to Mexico.

The U.S. District Attorney General's Middle Tennessee office announced Thursday that more than 300 law enforcement agents from 60 agencies arrested 24 people in the investigation dubbed Operation Red Ball.

A federal grand jury indicted 31 people on narcotics and money launderer charges.

According to the indictment, the defendants imported cocaine and marijuana from Mexico to sell in at least five Middle Tennessee counties. The drug operation also reportedly brought drugs into California and Arizona.

Investigators simultaneously raided several businesses and homes throughout the region. They confiscated at least \$150,000 in cash; guns; dozens of vehicles; drugs; and body armor. Early estimates suggest what authorities seized, which included property, total \$6 million.

Authorities said the drugs were kept in stash houses across the country before they were transported to Middle Tennessee.

An indictment represents an accusation and defendants are presumed innocent until and unless they are proven guilty, according to the U.S. District Attorney General's office.

By mid-afternoon, five people had appeared before a federal judge. Prosecutors filed a motion to hold the suspects without bond.

Sources said that the suspects were a mixture of prominent and ordinary people as well as convicted criminals.

"All the individuals do not touch drugs, but the one thing they do touch is the money," said an investigator.

NewsChannel 5 crews witnessed raids at 22 locations including Ed Locklayer's home in Wilson County and property owned by Darryl Moore. He was the first person to go through federal court Thursday afternoon. Moore is an owner of Level 88 Jazz Bistro, which authorities raided Wednesday night.

Cheryl Strichik, who owns a nearby business, said she was surprised to hear about the investigation.

"It's very surprising," she said. "The gentleman who owned the place is really nice. That's all we knew. He's been



here for a number of years as a business owner. He seemed to very nice."

Officials said their efforts dismantled the drug organization.

"This is really an investigation that stemmed from the streets of Franklin, Tenn., and went to the heart of Mexico," said Paul M. O'Brien, U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Tennessee.

"The organization was very sophisticated with graduate level skills in drug trafficking," said Harry Sommers, assistant special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Nashville District Office.

Authorities confiscated money from homes on Warrior Drive in Murfreesboro. Homeowner James Rowland was not arrested but at least two of his properties were raided. DEA agents said thousand of dollars were taken from the home.

Twenty-four people were arrested, but authorities said more people remain at large. Everyone processed by Thursday night was held without bond.