

Authorities: San Diego drug smuggling network dismantled

by Angelica Martinez

SAN DIEGO - A drug trafficking network based in San Diego County has been dismantled by authorities in an undercover operation that ended Thursday.

Damon Mosler, the narcotics division chief for the District Attorney's Office, said 59 people have been arrested locally during the course of the three-year operation. Forty of those arrested have already been prosecuted.

The announcement was made as authorities in other cities in California and across the country were concluding the operation with arrests of their own, Mosler said.

The operation began with the tip of a concerned citizen in April 2004 who tipped off authorities locally about a local drug dealer, said prosecutor Chris Lindberg.

Authorities investigated the tip which led them from a "low-level drug user" to key distributors in the United States and Mexico.

As many as 200 people were identified in the drug organization. Officials said the network smuggled large quantities of methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin from Guadalajara, Mexico, through Tijuana, Mexico, and into the United States.

Many of the drugs were repackaged in Chula Vista, Calif. The smugglers used such practices as stuffing tomato sauce and menudo cans with marijuana and sealing them back up.

Once repackaged, the drugs were moved to other cities, including San Francisco; Anaheim, Calif.; Riverside, Calif.; Yakima, Wash.; Detroit, Mich.; Atlanta, New York and Greensboro, N.C. Officials said homes in some of those cities served as "stash houses" for some of the drugs.

Investigators also seized \$9 million in San Diego County and a total of \$25 million in the operation.

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