Traffic stop leads to arrest of tobacco smugglers

by BWNS & Cheryl McDermott

After observing a number of traffic violations, a Deschutes County Sheriffâ€™s sergeant and deputy assisted by a drug-detecting K-9 partner stopped a van on Highway 97 Thursday and ultimately arrested three Fresno, California men for allegedly smuggling untaxed cigarettes and pirated DVD movies.

(L - R) Deputy Crawford, Narch, & Sgt. Cima with items seized during traffic stop - DCSO photo According to a news release prepared by Lt. Shane Nelson and Sgt. Gary Cima, the Toyota van was northbound on Highway 97 shortly after 11 a.m. October 11 when the traffic infractions were observed and the stop was initiated.

Cima, Deputy Crawford and â€œNarcâ€• found one of the suspects, 21-year old Jorge Renteria-Cuevas, hiding under a pile of blankets in the back of the van. Preliminary investigation suggests Renteria-Cuevas is in the country illegally.

A further search of the van uncovered about 55 cartons of untaxed Marlboro cigarettes and about 122 copies of allegedly pirated DVDs, plus numerous forged social security cards and resident alien cards and laminating materials, the news release stated.

Renteria-Cuevas and the other two men were taken into custody and lodged in the Deschutes County Jail. Also arrested were Jose Zambrano, 26, and Salvador Mercado, 52. Deputies believe that Mercado is a â€œpreviously deported felonâ€•.

All three suspects have been charged with unlawful Transport and distribution of Untaxed Cigarettes. Renteria-Cuevas is also charged with first-degree forgery.

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