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AFTON GENERAL STORE OWNER SENTENCED TO OVER 19 YEARS FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING

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SACRAMENTO, Calif., May 28 -- The U.S. Justice Department's Drug Enforcement Administration's San Francisco Field Office issued the following press release:

United States Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner announced that Jesus Rodriguez, 42, of Butte City, was sentenced today by United States District Judge Morrison C. England Jr. to 19 years and seven months in prison for his conviction on methamphetamine trafficking charges. On March 24, 2009, after a six-day trial, a federal jury found Rodriguez guilty of two counts of possession of 50 grams or more of methamphetamine with intent to distribute.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration, the **High Intensity Drug Trafficking** Area Task Force, the NET-5 Drug Task Force, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation and with the assistance of other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies that targeted methamphetamine distributors in Yuba, Sutter, and Glenn Counties. Assistant United States Attorneys Phillip A. Talbert and Heiko P. Coppola prosecuted the case.

The evidence introduced at trial showed that Rodriguez delivered one-half pound of crystal methamphetamine on two occasions in 2004 to an undercover DEA informant. The second transaction took place inside Rodriguez's place of business, the Afton General Store, in Glenn County. When officers and agents attempted to arrest Rodriguez, he led them on a high-speed car chase, during which he threw three-quarters of a pound of crystal methamphetamine out his car window. Rodriguez also called his sister during the chase. Rodriguez's sister was apprehended by agents and officers as she fled the rear of the store carrying a box containing four handguns and used drug packaging material. A search of the store pursuant to a federal search warrant revealed a digital scale and approximately \$30,000 in U.S. Currency, much of it in heat-sealed plastic. Agents also discovered DEA prerecorded buy funds among the heat-sealed currency. Rodriguez testified at trial and claimed he had been entrapped, a claim that the jury rejected.

In sentencing Rodriguez, Judge England noted the large amounts of highly pure crystal methamphetamine Rodriguez distributed, calling him a "high level" drug trafficker. Judge England remarked, "This is one of the largest methamphetamine trafficking cases there has been in Northern California." Judge England made a specific finding that Rodriguez obstructed justice when he took the stand and testified under oath that he had never sold drugs before and was entrapped into committing the crimes, and took that finding into account in determining Rodriguez's sentence.

In all, 30 defendants were convicted of drug charges arising out of the investigation, including Rafael Ojeda-Ontiveros, aka Pancho Aceka (210 months), Alfredo Ojeda-Moreno (168 months), Francisco Garcia-Gandarilla (168 months), Michael Ayala (146 months), Juan Pablo Velasquez (135 months), Maclovio Acosta (135 months), Benito Topete (120 months), Angel Gomez (120 months), Ramon Ramirez (120 months), Adan Ayala, Jr. (120 months), Armando

Solis (108 months), Vicente Ocadio (108 months), and Jose Santana Rivera (103 months).

"This case shows that our office together with our law enforcement partners will vigorously investigate and prosecute those individuals and organizations who peddle large quantities of illegal drugs in our community and across the country," said U.S. Attorney Wagner. For more information please contact: Sarabjit Jagirdar, Email:- htsyndication@hindustantimes.com