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**U.S. CHARGES 28 DEFENDANTS IN ALLEGED CRACK COCAINE CONSPIRACY
INVOLVING GANGSTER DISCIPLES FACTION ON CITY'S SOUTH SIDE**

CHICAGO – A federal investigation led by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, working together with the Cook County Sheriff's Police – code-named *Operation Dead-Eye* – has resulted in federal drug conspiracy charges against 28 defendants, including **Isaiah Hicks**, who allegedly headed a South Side faction of the Gangster Disciples street gang that trafficked in crack cocaine and firearms, law enforcement officials announced today. Hicks and his co-defendants allegedly controlled retail street sales of crack cocaine – which they processed after purchasing approximately one to two kilograms of powder cocaine a month – in a neighborhood block bordered by West 54th Street on the north, Garfield Boulevard on the south, South Hoyne Avenue on the west and South Seeley Avenue on the east in Chicago. Many of the defendants are allegedly members of the Damenville Gangster Disciples – named for Damen Avenue, a major north-south artery just east of the square block area – a subset of the Gangster Disciple nation. The Damenville GD gang, which allegedly operates in a broader area bounded roughly by Western and Ashland avenues and 48th and 59th streets, is dominated by the “5-4 Crew,” the name given to the Hicks-led faction based in and around 54th and South Hoyne, according to the federal charges.

ATF agents and sheriff's police began arresting the defendants this morning and simultaneously executed seven federal search warrants and seized three luxury automobiles. Also seized were two loaded guns and undetermined amounts of drugs and cash. In early March, more than 324 grams of crack cocaine (nearly one-third kilogram) were seized by law enforcement during the investigation.

An undercover ATF agent posed as a drug customer and made at least 10 controlled drug purchases of crack cocaine from alleged sellers during the investigation. All 28 defendants were charged with conspiracy to possess and distribute more than 5 kilograms of cocaine and more than 50 grams of crack cocaine since April 2007, announced, Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Andrew L. Traver, Special Agent-in-Charge of ATF in Chicago; and Thomas Dart, Cook County Sheriff. The investigation was conducted through the federal High Intensity Drug-Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF).

At 11 a.m. today, 20 defendants, including Hicks, also known as "Cuz," "Big Cuz," "Rock" and "Chill Rock," 32, of Harvey, were in custody, and they were scheduled to appear at 10:30 a.m. Thursday before U.S. Magistrate Judge Martin Ashman in U.S. District Court.

"The combination of gangs, drugs and guns poses a great danger of violence," Mr. Fitzgerald said. "Although no violence is charged here, federal, state and local law enforcement will remain vigilant in prosecuting alleged gang leaders and members involved in illegal weapons and drug-trafficking. This case is yet another example of our determination to rid city blocks and neighborhoods of gang-controlled drug-trafficking so law-abiding citizens can live without fear."

Mr. Traver said: “Gang drug-trafficking is a scourge upon the good citizens of Chicago and continues to be a catalyst driving all too frequent urban violence. The most direct and effective impact that ATF can make is to attack and dismantle those gang factions most active in the illegal trafficking of narcotics. These arrests today are a significant strike by law enforcement against the Gangster Disciples street gang, but, more importantly, they represent a victory for the outraged community, willing to suffer this pervasive criminal activity no longer.”

Sheriff Dart said: “The tentacles of Chicago street gangs reach out across the suburbs and the entire region. Partnerships between federal and local law enforcement, like the operation that has concluded today, are vital if we are to stop the gangs before they expand their influence and violence.”

According to a 188-page affidavit by an ATF agent, between April and December 2007, an ATF undercover agent made nine controlled purchases of crack cocaine, totaling more than 500 grams, from **Corey Williams**, 27, an alleged drug broker for Hicks. Telephone records show that during seven of the drug deals with Williams, phone calls were placed either to or from phones used by Hicks, and Williams implicated Hicks as his supplier, the affidavit alleges. All of the sales took place in or around the area of 54th and Hoyne, near 5358 South Hoyne Ave., a residence associated with Hicks. On Feb. 28, 2008, the undercover agent made a 10th purchase of crack cocaine from Williams, after court-authorized wiretaps showed that Williams arranged to purchase 63 grams of crack cocaine from Hicks, which Williams then sold to the agent, the charges allege.

Hicks allegedly employed several runners who he either paid directly to serve customers, or whom he provided narcotics to on credit, and he also used several distributors, who purchased quantities of drugs on credit, according to the charges.

The investigation also relied on a confidential informant, CI-2, who told agents that he had been a Gangster Disciple member since he was 13 or 14 years old and sold drugs in the vicinity of 54th and Hoyne since approximately that age. CI-2 told agents that he had a good friend who was a GD member who worked for Hicks before being murdered in early 2007 in the same area.

In addition to Hicks and Williams, the defendants include his alleged “second-in-command” and main runner, **Kevin Masuca**, aka “Zook,” 24, of Chicago, who allegedly made deliveries to customers at Hicks’ direction. He also was responsible for maintaining a stash of narcotics and cash at his residence, located at 5437 S. Hoyne, as well as accounting records of money owed by customers and workers. Other alleged participants (all of Chicago unless otherwise noted) in the conspiracy include:

Ivory Watson, aka “Bird,” 20; **Ahmad Williams**, aka “AG” and “G-ball,” 26; **Daniel Coprich**, aka “D-Block,” 34 – on March 5, 2008, law enforcement officers seized \$1,250 from Coprich after he was stopped following a meeting with Hicks; **Sanford Townsend, Jr.**, aka “4-5” and “Nook,” 32; **Vincent Straughter**, aka “Vino” and “Dski,” 26; **Jamal Washington**, aka “Little Cuz” and “Mal,” who was allegedly directly involved in three controlled purchases of crack cocaine made by the undercover agent; **Glenn Island**, aka “Baby Dough,” 31; and **Kevin Gordon**, aka “Big Bird,” 26.

Others defendants are **Tameka Grant**, aka “Mika” and “Meka,” 31; **Johnnie Lavell Young**, aka “Ville” and “Vell,” 32 – on March 1, 2008, law enforcement officers seized 83 grams of crack cocaine from Young after he was stopped following a meeting with Hicks; **Joshua McElroy**, aka “Boss Hog,” 27; **Clifton Haralson**, 24; who was allegedly directly involved in a July 2007 controlled purchase of crack cocaine by the undercover agent; **Dwayne Garrett**, aka “Wayne,” 35, of

Bolingbrook – on March 3, 2008, law enforcement officers stopped a car Garrett was driving and seized 241.4 grams of crack cocaine following a drug transaction arranged with Hicks and conducted directly with Masuca; **Patrick Jones**, aka “Hog,” 35, of Milwaukee, an associate of Garrett’s who participated in the deal Garrett arranged with Hicks and conducted with Masuca and who attempted to flee and discard the crack cocaine that was recovered; **Scott Oneal**, 33; **Michael Gonzalez**, 26, of Burbank, a runner for a cocaine supplier who was involved in a march 13, 2008, delivery of powder cocaine to Hicks on behalf of one of Hicks’ alleged suppliers, **Ubex Lopez**, aka “Little Man,” 28, of Burbank; **Romell Hollingsworth**, aka “Grosso,” 28; **Deshaun Germany**, aka “Deonte,” “4-5’s Cousin,” “Big Sin” and “Sin,” 23; **Joe Long**, aka “Baby Joe” and “BJ,” 31; **Christopher Gavin**, 22; **Andrea Thomas**, aka “Daphne Thomas,” 32; **Latasha Williams**, aka “Tasha B,” 24; **Ethel J. Harold**, 21; and **Maxine Ruffetti**, 20.

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sharon Fairley, Steven Kubiowski and Eric Hogstrom.

If convicted, each defendant faces a mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison and a maximum of life imprisonment without parole and a maximum fine of \$4 million. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed under the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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