



Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota holds up an assault weapon seized in a drug raid. ■ Video, photos: newsday.com/suffolk

DA: LI drug ring busted

■ **44 pounds of cocaine** headed for Amityville seized

■ **20 accused** of acting as couriers, distributors

BY ELLEN YAN

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A cross-country cocaine pipeline dried up after 44 pounds of the powder bound for Amityville were seized in California, leading to the indictment of 20 people who acted as drug couriers and distributors, Suffolk and federal officials said yesterday.

Six ringleaders were indicted in June on charges of operating as major traffickers, and all the defendants — 19 from Suffolk — were indicted on second-degree conspiracy to distribute, District Attorney Thomas Spota said in a Hauppauge news conference.

They were arrested June 17, when about 150 agents from the federal Department of Homeland Security and scores of Suffolk police and detectives raided 14 Long Island locations.

Items seized from homes and cars, laid out yesterday in Spota's office, included about \$440,000 in cash, almost 9 pounds of cocaine, 39 firearms, a bill-counting machine and a can of Ajax cleanser used to hide cocaine.

"There was a lot of cocaine



Items seized in a drug raid included about \$440,000 in cash, firearms and almost 9 pounds of cocaine.

coming into Suffolk County from California, through Mexico," said Spota, who stood with Anthony Scandiffio, deputy special agent in charge for Homeland Security investigations in New York.

The 44 pounds of cocaine, or 20 kilos, were discovered in a Los Angeles-area home in June of last year by police and homeland security agents — drugs intended for Juan Funes, owner of a housecleaning service with 30 employees, investigators said.

Spota said his investigators and Homeland Security agents had been looking into Funes separately, and they "seamlessly" teamed up after the California bust, launching a five-month wiretap of 16 phones with surveillance from Amityville police.

Funes, 39, had drivers going to California to pick up the drugs, stash them in secret compartments in the cars, then drive back to Long Island, prosecutors said.

One courier, Brizaura Rodriguez, 34, of Bellerose, made four or five trips between late 2012 and early 2013, taking 12 to 20 kilos each time, or up to about \$700,000 in cocaine, investigators said.

Funes paid his supplier about \$34,000 to \$35,000 per kilo, Spota said, then sold it to Suffolk distributors. The cocaine, repeatedly sold to distributors down the line and cut, would perhaps go for \$50 a gram in street sales, prosecutors said.

When the California pipeline was capped, Funes got cocaine from another supplier, Juan San-

tana, 30, of Copiague, Spota said. Santana was also indicted as a major trafficker.

But Funes' attorney, Brian Griffin of Garden City, said his client entered a not guilty plea and challenged allegations from Spota, who said a hole in the floor of Funes' bedroom closet hid drugs and related material.

"Juan Funes is a well-respected business and family man," Griffin said. "Contrary to earlier information no drugs or guns were found in Mr. Funes' house, which certainly calls into question his role as an alleged drug trafficker."

Rodriguez's attorney, Michael Alber of Commack, said his client also pleaded not guilty and was "wrongfully looped" into the case: "She's just not involved in this conspiracy."

Santana's attorney, George Duncan of Central Islip, said he has not seen any proof of his client's guilt, saying, "My client categorically denies supplying anybody with cocaine."

Spota said he was struck by how the defendants weren't typical cocaine dealers — most had legitimate jobs, such as deli owner, a gutter business owners, an optical lens maker, a day trader and taxi driver.

But they were like Funes, he said: "He was camouflaging his real profit, coming from the sale of drugs."

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CORRECTIONS

Rockville Centre's Noah Rubin will play his U.S. Open doubles match today. The day was incorrect yesterday.

Mets third baseman David Wright has a rotator cuff bruise in his left shoulder. The injury was incorrectly described yesterday.

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Monday is Labor Day. Government offices, schools, courts, the financial markets and post offices will be closed. The Long Island Rail Road will provide additional early-afternoon service from Penn Station tomorrow. The LIRR and Nassau Inter-County Express will operate on Sunday schedules on Labor Day. Suffolk County Transit will offer limited holiday service; check schedules.

THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1609 English sea explorer Henry Hudson and his ship, the Half Moon, reached present-day Delaware Bay.
1862 The Second Battle of Bull Run, also known as Second Manassas, began in Prince William County, Virginia, during the Civil War; the result was a Confederate victory.
1963 More than 200,000 people listened as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.