

RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Judge denies bond for Brownsville gym owner

Man accused of cocaine trafficking

BY SERGIO CHAPA
THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

A Brownsville gym owner remains in custody and is heading to trial on cocaine trafficking charges. A federal judge on Thursday denied his request to receive a bond.



DELEON

Federal agents arrested Powerhouse Gym owner Jose DeLeon, 39, Jan. 6 during coordinated searches of his business and Bravo Street home.

DeLeon was the next to last person arrested on a five-count, 16-person indictment issued against local drug trafficker Juan Carlos Sanchez Vasquez in January 2005.

The last person, who was unidentified, is still at large, court records show. All of those named in the indict-

ment were living in Cameron County and many were originally from Matamoros, records show.

DeLeon is accused of selling large amounts of a dietary supplement, inositol, which drug pushers used to cut their shipments of cocaine.

The 39-year-old husband and father, who has been held without bond since his arrest, appeared for an arraignment and bond hearing before U.S. Magistrate Judge Felix Recio Thursday morning.

DeLeon pleaded not guilty to a conspiracy to possession with the intent to distribute cocaine charge while his attorney, Javier Villarreal, argued that he was neither a risk of flight nor a danger to the community.

"Unlike the other defendants in the case, he is a United States citizen, owns a business and has strong ties to the community," Villarreal said, adding that his client remained in "plain sight" following the indictment without being arrested until last week.

Federal officials revealed in open court that DeLeon

had a prior criminal history of delivery of marijuana and was kidnapped in Matamoros in October and held for a \$50,000 ransom.

Villarreal described the incident as an "express" kidnapping that took place on the same day the gym received a large number of membership dues and argued that it was further proof his client would not flee to Mexico.

"He hasn't been back since," Villarreal said.

Federal court records show that DeLeon's trial is expected to start in March.

Although all the other defendants who have been arrested and charged in the case have entered into their separate plea agreements, Villarreal said his client's case "needs to be tried."

"There's nothing wrong with selling this vitamin, per se," Villarreal said of DeLeon's role. "Anybody can sell it. How it's used is up to the person who buys it. They could have bought at GNC or over the Internet."

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Appeals court upholds judge's decision to dismiss DWI case

BY SERGIO CHAPA
THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

A state appeals court on Jan. 3 upheld a Cameron County judge's decision to dismiss a driving while intoxicated case against former county attorney Doug Wright.

South Padre Island police arrested the 56-year-old man on Nov. 20, 2004, and charged him for a single-vehicle accident, as well as DWI and unlawfully carrying a weapon after they found a handgun inside his SUV.

County Court at-Law No. 3 Judge Daniel Robles dismissed the DWI and unlawful carrying a weapon charges against Wright after he pleaded no contest to all three charges in March 2005.

District Attorney Armando Villalobos filed a case in April with the 13th Court of Appeals to get a DWI conviction.

Although an opinion was not available at press time, court records show that a three-judge panel upheld Robles' decision to throw

out the DWI.

According to court records, prosecutors have until Wednesday to file a motion to have the case reheard.

Villalobos said they would take the case to a higher court.

Court records show that Wright is currently on probation for the auto accident in addition to facing a disorderly conduct charge in August on a South Padre Island beach.

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Reputed gang members plead not guilty in slaying of Harlingen woman

BY WESLEY SHOLTES
VALLEY MORNING STAR

RAYMONDVILLE — Reputed Mexican Mafia members were scheduled for a courthouse appearance Thursday to enter pleas in the 2003 death of a Harlingen woman. Instead, they were arraigned in a training room at the county jail.

Nine of 10 reputed gang members pleaded not guilty to murder charges in the death of Jo Ann Chavez, 33.

The 10th suspect will be arraigned later.

Security concerns prompted authorities to move the arraignment from the Willacy County Courthouse to the county jail.

Noe Robles, a defense attorney, said authorities diverted the arraignment to "avoid the fear of rumors of the Mexican Mafia retaliating."

The alleged captain of the Mexican Mafia group, Wilfred Padilla, Jr., was not released from federal custody in Ohio but will be arraigned in the near future, special prosecutor Rebecca RuBane of the Cameron County District Attorney's Office said.

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