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TWENTY-FOUR CHARGED IN MAJOR DRUG SWEEP
FOLLOWING UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION AT TWO QUEENS GYMS

More than 60 Undercover Narcotic and Steroid Purchases Allegedly Made; Among Defendants Are Gym Employees and Members – Including Ninth Ranked Junior Lightweight Female Boxer and Trainer

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown, joined by Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly, today announced the filing of criminal charges against two dozen individuals – including the ninth ranked lightweight female boxer and her husband/trainer – on drug-related charges as a result of an eighteen-month undercover investigation focused on two gyms in the Flushing and College Point sections of Queens. The gyms have been shut down and padlocked under court orders sought by the NYPD.

District Attorney Brown identified the gyms as the Powerhouse Gym, located at 35-09 Francis Lewis Boulevard in Flushing, and the Envy Us Gym, located at 126-19 20th Avenue in College Point. The gyms were declared public nuisances yesterday and ordered closed by Queens Supreme Court Justice Orin R. Kitzes.

District Attorney Brown said, “Far from being healthy environments for the body and the mind, the gyms were allegedly turned into drug supermarkets by many of the defendants who openly and illegally sold performance drugs wanted by body builders, as well as a cornucopia of highly addictive and potentially dangerous prescription painkillers and street drugs, in and around the two locations. Today, we issue a clear message – businesses that allow drug trafficking or other criminal activity to occur on their premises are at risk of being shut down and those breaking the law face felony charges and serious prison time.”

Commissioner Kelly said, “I wish to commend the detectives and prosecutors for their diligence in shutting down these two gyms that served as drug dens and posed health risks to the misguided athletes who thought they could benefit from the steroids and other illegal substances sold there.”

The investigation began in March 2006 when the NYPD’s Queens Narcotic Division began to make a number of undercover narcotic buys and conduct extensive physical surveillance at the Powerhouse and the Envy Us Gyms. As a result, District Attorney Brown’s Narcotics Investigation Bureau was able to obtain court authorization for search warrants to be executed at ten locations – including the two gyms and the residences of various defendants.

In executing a search warrant at the College Point home of defendants Gregory Kovar and Grace Labartino, for instance, police allegedly discovered a makeshift steroid lab and recovered torches, a centrifuge, syringes and gallon bottles containing liquid steroids. In all, police recovered more than an ounce

of cocaine, a .357 revolver, a shotgun, approximately 50 Oxycontin pills, numerous boxes containing steroids in both liquid and powder form, and nearly \$40,000 in cash as a result of the search warrants.

Typically, drug dealers who manufacture their own steroids purchase hormones in powder form from outside the United States. The dealer then mixes the powder hormone with oil and alcohol and “cooks” it into liquid form. The liquid is then packaged into bottles, generally 10 or 20 milliliter bottles, which are generally referred to as “cycles” by body builders.

During the investigation, the undercover officers – who posed as drug dealers – are alleged to have made more than sixty separate purchases of steroids, cocaine and prescription narcotics – such as Vicodin, Oxycontin Percocet and Xanax – from the defendants. Many of the purchases were allegedly made inside the locker rooms, on the gym floor, in the trainer’s office and near the front desk.

The defendants are variously charged with numerous counts of first-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance, a Class A-1 felony punishable by up to twenty years in prison, second-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance, a Class A-2 felony punishable by up to ten years in prison, third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance, a Class B felony punishable by up to nine years in prison, fourth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance, a Class C felony punishable by up to five and one-half years in prison, fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance, a Class D felony punishable by up to two and a half -years in prison, fourth-degree grand larceny, a Class E felony punishable by up to one and one-third years to four years in prison, and fourth-degree criminal sale of marihuana, a Class A misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in jail.

The investigation was conducted by Detectives Sean McLoughlin, Michael Sykora, Gilbert Rivera, Raymond Obiol and Daniel Moncayo and Captain Andrew Savino, of the New York City Police Departments Queens Narcotics Division under the command of Inspector Robert Napolitano, and under the overall supervision of Deputy Chief James O’Neill, Commanding Officer, Narcotics Division, and Chief Anthony Izzo, Commanding Officer, Organized Crime Control Bureau. Assistant District Attorneys David H. Chiang and Milton Yu of the Queens County District Attorneys Office’s Narcotics Investigations Bureau, also assisted in the investigation.

Assistant District Attorney Chiang is prosecuting the cases under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Wilbert J. LeMelle, Bureau Chief, Karen J. Friedman, Deputy Bureau Chief, Mark L. Katz, Supervisor, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that criminal complaints are merely accusations and that defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: E-version of this press release posted at www.queensda.org

SEE ADDENDUM FOR DETAILS ON DEFENDANTS

ADDENDUM

Gerald Alvarez, 26, of 149045 Northern Boulevard in Flushing, is charged with first- and second-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to twenty years in prison. He is presently being sought.

Bryan Benini, 43, of 882 Arctic Street in Lindenhurst, New York, is a former employee and currently a member of the Powerhouse Gym. He is charged with third- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.

Vikki Comer, 22, of 15-60 200th Street in Bayside, Queens, and 32 Bartlett Street in New Brunswick, New Jersey, is the girlfriend of defendant Vincent Labartino. She is charged with third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, she faces up to nine years in prison.

Alex DiPietrantonio, 24, of 21-03 Murray Street in Whitestone, Queens, is a member of the Envy Us Gym. He is charged with second- and -third-degree grand larceny. If convicted, he faces up to ten years in prison.

Robert Gheorghita, 33, of 144-63 35th Avenue in Flushing, Queens, is a former employee and currently a member of the Powerhouse Gym. He is charged with first-, second-, third- and fourth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to twenty years in prison.

Mario Godoy, 34, of 39-41 213th Street in Bayside, Queens, and 7150 South Euclid Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, is an employee and member of the Powerhouse Gym. He is charged with fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to two and one-half years in prison.

Dmitri Katakalides, 25, of 114-31 South Drive in Malba, Queens, is a member of the Powerhouse Gym. He is charged with third- and fourth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.

Gregory Kovar, 43, of 3-26 Julius Road in College Point, Queens, is the husband of defendant Grace Labartino. He is charged with second- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to ten years in prison.

Charles Kubelka, 31, of 14-76 154th Street in Whitestone, Queens, is charged with second-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to ten years in prison.

Grace Labartino, 42, of 3-26 Julius Road in College Point, Queens, is the sister of defendant Vincent Labartino and the wife of defendant Gregory Kovar. She is charged with first-degree conspiracy to commit a sale of a controlled substance and fifth-degree attempted criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, she faces up to eight and one-half years to 25 years in prison.

Vincent Labartino, 41, of 119-38 7th Avenue in Whitestone, Queens, is the brother of defendant Grace Labartino and the brother-in-law of defendant Gregory Kovar. Labartino, who used to work at a personal trainer at both gyms, is charged with first-, second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to twenty years in prison.

James Lana, 43, of 43-18 208th Street in Bayside, Queens, is a member of the Powerhouse Gym and the owner of Turbo Contracting. He is charged with first-, second-, third-, fourth- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to twenty years in prison.

Jordan Maldonado, 41, of 74-19 85th Drive in Woodhaven, Queens, is the manager and a boxing trainer at Envy Us Gym. He is the husband of Cindy Serrano, presently the ninth ranked junior lightweight female boxer, and the brother-in-law of defendant Amanda Serrano. Maldonado was featured in "Bounce: Behind the Velvet Rope," a film about nightclub bouncers. He is charged with second- third- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance and fourth-degree grand larceny. If convicted, he faces up to ten years in prison.

Victor Maria, 42, of 14-27 116th Street in College Point, Queens. He is charged with third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.

Benigno Mercado, 40, of Queens, is a member of the Powerhouse Gym and a former police officer. He is charged with second- and fourth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to ten years in prison.

Michael Minutillo, 42, of 208-08 43rd Avenue in Bayside, Queens, is an employee of defendant James Lana's construction company. He is charged with first- and third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to twenty years in prison.

Matthew Moody, 34, of 64-35 186th Lane in Fresh Meadows, Queens, is the manger and a member of the Powerhouse Gym. Moody, who is the boyfriend of defendant Jessica Mosca, is charged with second- third-, fourth- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to ten years in prison.

Jessica Mosca, 31, of 64-35 186th Lane in Fresh Meadows, Queens, is the girlfriend of defendant Matthew Moody. She is charged with second-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, she faces up to ten years in prison.

Giancarlo Ruocco, 17, of 34-42 202nd Street in Bayside, Queens, is a member and a former part time employee of the Envy Us Gym. He is charged with third- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.

Michael Riccobono, 28, of 199-31 34th Avenue in Bayside, Queens, is a member of the Powerhouse Gym. He is charged with third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.

Christopher Rodriguez, 30, of 70-05 165th Street in Fresh Meadows, Queens, is a member of the Powerhouse Gym. He is charged with third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.

Cindy "Checkmate" Serrano, 25, of 59 Stanhope Street in Brooklyn, is the ninth ranked junior lightweight female boxer and a member of the Envy Us Gym. She is the wife of defendant Jordan Maldonado and the sister of defendant Amanda Serrano. She is charged with third- and fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, she faces up to nine years in prison.

Amanda Serrano, 19, of 59 Stanhope Street in Brooklyn, is the sister of defendant Cindy Serrano and the sister-in-law of defendant Jordan Maldonado. She is charged with fifth-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, she faces two and one-half years in prison.

Alessandro Vozzolo, 53, of 314 Wolf Hill Road in Dix Hills, Long Island, is the owner of Paces Barber Shop at 40-02 Bell Boulevard in Bayside, Queens. He is charged with second- and third-degree criminal sale of a controlled substance. If convicted, he faces up to nine years in prison.