

Kirbyville Man Pleads Guilty To \$1.3 Million Mail Fraud And Money Laundering
News

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Michael J. Saguto, 43, of Kirbyville, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge David P. Rush to participating in a conspiracy to commit mail fraud and to participating in a conspiracy to commit money laundering.



Under the terms of the plea agreement, Saguto must forfeit to the government \$1,354,034, which represents the proceeds of the mail fraud conspiracy and for which Saguto is jointly and severally liable with his co-defendants.

By pleading guilty, Saguto admitted that he conspired with others between March 1, 2011, and June 24, 2013, to defraud the Food and Drug Administration and to defraud the public by falsely representing that a number of synthetic cannabinoid products were "incense" or "potpourri" and "not for human consumption." In reality, Saguto admitted, these substances contained compounds that were intended for human consumption as a drug.

Based upon the invoices, ledgers, and product seizures by law enforcement, this conspiracy was responsible for the manufacture and/or distribution of at least 188.14038 kilograms of synthetic cannabinoid products.

Co-defendants Travis E. Butchee, also known as "Donkey," 38, of Springfield, and Christian L. Turner, 46, of Kirbyville, have also pleaded guilty. Butchee pleaded guilty to the same two conspiracy charges; Turner pleaded guilty to possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance analogue and to being a felon in possession of firearms. Travis Butchee's wife, Victoria A. Butchee, also known as Victoria A. Wohlin, 29, of Springfield, also has pleaded guilty to her role in the mail fraud conspiracy.

Travis Butchee opened The Man Cave, a retail business at 1927 S.Glenstone in Springfield, in February 2013. Travis Butchee and Saguto are the owners of Southern Spice, LLC and Saguto is the owner of Blues Away, a head shop and novelty store in Memphis, Tenn. Turner was employed by Saguto at Blues Away.

Today's plea agreement cites a number of transactions in which materials used to manufacture and distribute synthetic cannabinoids were shipped via UPS or FedEx to members of the conspiracy including controlled substance analogues (synthetic chemical compounds similar to THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana), green leafy substances which served as carrier media, labels that were affixed to packages of "Donkey Punch," "Jolly Grape Giant," "South of the Tracks," "Baby Face," "Scarface," "Hillbilly Hay," and other synthetic cannabinoid products, and foil and plastic packaging bags.

Travis Butchee and Saguto also admitted that they conducted financial transactions that involved the proceeds of the unlawful mail fraud conspiracy. They conspired to wire funds to the People's Republic of China in order to carry out the conspiracy.

Turner, who has been convicted of a felony, admitted that he was in possession of a Ruger .22-caliber rifle, a Marlin 30-30 caliber rifle, a Rossi .243-caliber rifle with an interchangeable

20-gauge barrel, a Remington 12-gauge shotgun and a Remington .270-caliber rifle. Taney County sheriff's deputies seized those firearms when they responded to an assault call on March 15, 2013. Turner was arrested and a search warrant was served on his residence. The following items were seized: the seven long guns and associated ammunition, drug paraphernalia, including 242 smoking pipes, and three bags of synthetic cannabinoids.

Under federal statutes, Saguto and Travis Butchee are each subject to a sentence of up to 40 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$750,000. Turner is subject to a sentence of up to 30 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$1,250,000. Victoria Butchee is subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. Sentencing hearings will be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the United States Probation Office.