

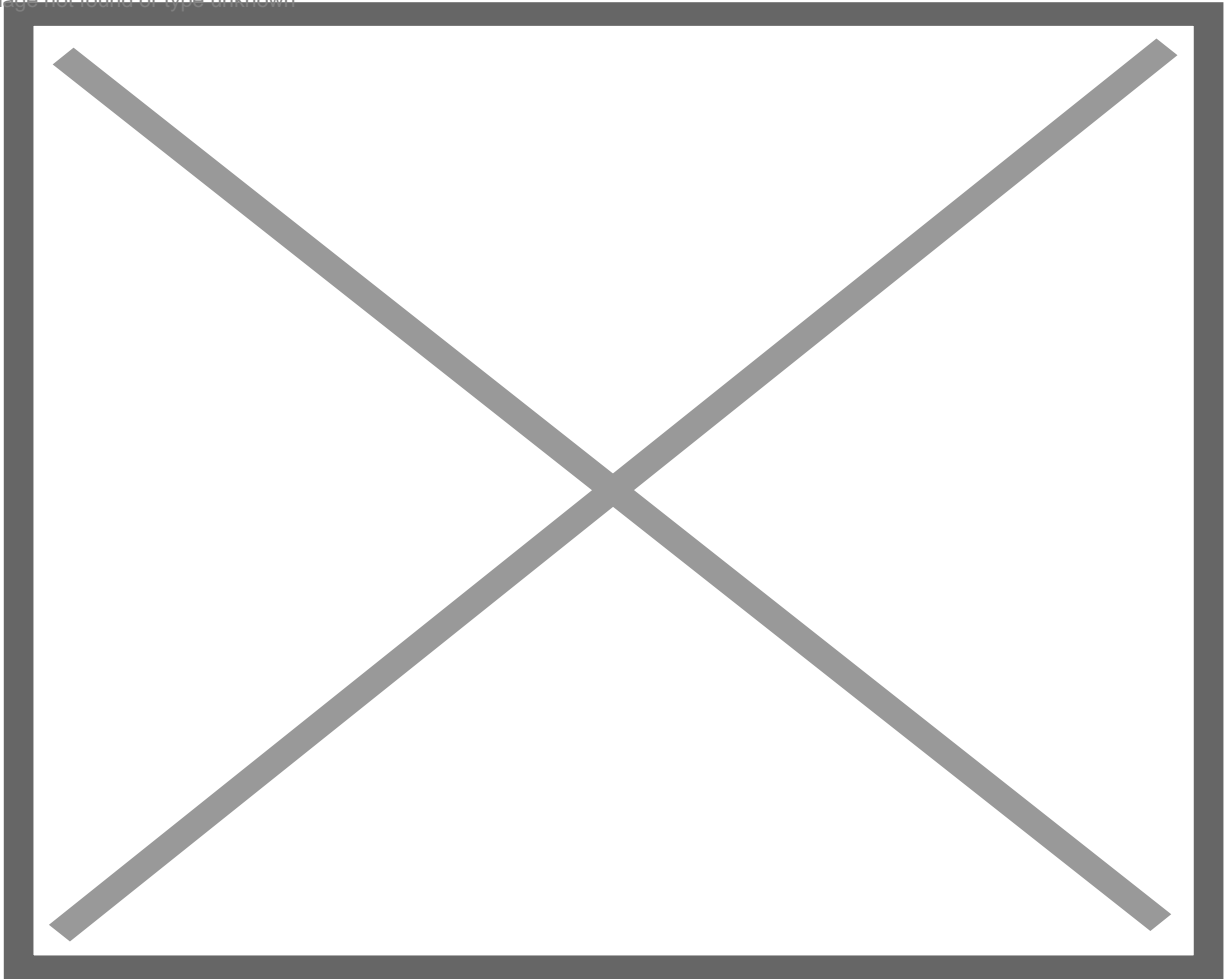
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# DEA Agents Seize 25 Bricks of Cocaine, Two Firearms During Massive Drug Bust at Havensight Mall; Five Men Arrested

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United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced today that charges have been filed against five men for conspiracy to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine. Matthew Hazel, Jose Solano, Andrew Wilson, Cesar Thomas, and Lodwin Aahton were arrested Thursday and made their initial appearances in federal court Friday.

A person with knowledge of the matter [told the Consortium](#) late Thursday that federal agents led by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) conducted an operation in the Havensight Shopping Mall in the vicinity of the Tap & Still restaurant resulting in the arrest of multiple individuals and confiscation of multiple bricks of cocaine.

According to court documents, on October 13, 2021, a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Confidential Source (CS) met with Jose Solano to discuss the purchase of twenty-five (25) kilograms of cocaine in St. Thomas. During the meeting, Solano agreed to sell the CS twenty-five kilograms of cocaine for \$312,000. Cesar Thomas was also present with Solano during the meeting. Solano agreed to conduct the transaction on the following day.

On October 14 at approximately, 4:01 PM, agents and the CS arrived at the Havensight Mall, St. Thomas, which was the agreed-upon location for the CS to meet up with Solano for the 25-kilogram exchange. At approximately 4:03 PM, agents observed Solano arrive in a black Toyota Tacoma. Solano parked in the area between the Smoking Rooster and the Post Office, next to where the CS was located. Solano then exited the Tacoma a short time later.

Subsequently, a black Honda Civic, arrived, driven by Cesar Thomas with Andrew Wilson in the front passenger seat. Thomas and Wilson parked in the vicinity of Solano's vehicle; both exited the vehicle and congregated around both the Honda and the Tacoma for about 45 minutes to an hour. During that time, federal agents observed Wilson on his phone several times, while pacing through the parking lot. Agents also observed Wilson using hand gestures to direct a dark colored Jeep Wrangler and black G35 Infiniti to his location in the Havensight Mall parking lot. The two cars—the Jeep, followed by the Infiniti—arrived on scene at approximately 4:44 p.m.

The Jeep, a dark-colored Jeep Wrangler, was driven by Lodwin Ashton. After Ashton parked the Jeep in the same vicinity as the CS, the Tacoma, and the Honda Civic, agents observed Thomas and Wilson approach the Jeep and talk with Ashton. Moments later, the black G35 Infiniti sedan, which bore no license plate, joined the group. The Infiniti was driven by Matthew Hazel, and Jenel Smith was in the backseat.

Agents observed Thomas and Wilson approach Hazel and converse with him. Moments later, agents observed Hazel exit the G35 Infiniti as the trunk of the vehicle sprung open. Agents then observed Thomas, Hazel, and the CS at the rear of the G35 looking into the trunk. Moments later, agents observed Hazel close the trunk as the CS gave a signal to the agents, confirming the presence of kilograms of suspected cocaine to be present within the G35 Infiniti.

Agents arrested Solano, Thomas, Wilson, Ashton, Hazel, and Smith, who were later transported to the DEA St. Thomas Resident Office for processing. After the arrest, agents recovered approximately twenty-five (25) brick-like packages of suspected cocaine from the trunk of the G35 Infiniti and one (1) loaded semi-automatic Walther Arms handgun; model PPX; bearing serial number FBB2800, which Hazel was sitting on in the driver's seat. Agents also recovered a second loaded semi-automatic handgun from the Jeep Wrangler, which was located underneath the steering wheel.

This case is being investigated jointly by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Homeland Security Investigation (HSI), Air Marine Operations (AMO), Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and Virgin Islands Police Department (VIPD). It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Meredith Edwards and Juan Albino.

United States Attorney Shappert reminded the public that a complaint is merely a formal charging document, and it is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.