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POLICE: Joint forces investigation nabs "the Gretzky of organized crime"

International crime ring busted

BY CHRISTOPHER DOURIS
 STAFF WRITER

A two-year joint forces international investigation has ended with the arrest of a Woodbridge resident who is "the Gretzky of organized crime," according to police.

Alfonso Caruana is one of three York Region residents — and one of nine Canadians — who were arrested in early morning raids yesterday, as part of an effort to smash a 30-year-old organized crime operation led by the Cuntrera-Caruana Sicilian family.

Caruana is charged with drug trafficking and conspiracy charges in connection with a world-wide drug smuggling and money-laundering operation.

"If organized crime was a game of hockey, Mr. Caruana would be Gretzky," RCMP Insp. Ben Soave said yesterday on announcing the result of "Project Omerta" — the mafia tradition of loyalty and silence — conducted by RCMP, OPP, Toronto, York and Peel region forces.

"This group was trafficking all over the world," Soave said at a news conference at the RCMP media centre in Toronto that was attended by representatives of the five forces and the Carabinieri, the Italian military police.

According to police, Caruana is the kingpin of an empire he has controlled from his modest home in the Pine Valley Drive and Langstaff Road area.

The Cuntrera-Caruana family, described as one of the mafia's biggest drug traffickers and money launderers in South America, set up in Venezuela in 1963 after leaving the Sicilian province of Agrigento following purges by the Italian government, Soave explained.

The Cuntrera brothers, Pasquale, Paolo and Gaspare, were arrested by police there and extradited to Italy in 1992. Police said Caruana came to Canada in 1968, settling in Montreal then returned to Venezuela before moving to Woodbridge in 1995.

Described by police as a "money-laundering genius," Caruana was caught in the 1980s entering Switzerland with \$600,000 in a suitcase.

More than \$13 million has gone through Caruana's bank account, York Regional Police Det. Sgt. Jack More said, but he recently declared bankruptcy, claiming only \$250 in assets. (He) claimed to make \$400 a week in an automotive place washing cars, More said.

Caruana was ordered by the court to

pay \$90,000 in back taxes in three years.

Soave said Toronto Police learned in April 1995 that Caruana was living in the Toronto area, which was confirmed by the FBI in New York.

Italian authorities confirmed Caruana was a major figure in the Cuntrera-Caruana family. The combined forces unit began its investigation in June 1996. Then, last March, police learned the group was planning to ship a large quantity of cocaine to Canada, Soave said.

Police seized 200 kilos of cocaine, with a wholesale value of \$6 million, in Houston, Texas, May 16. At the same time, the organization was preparing the next shipment for the first week of June, he said.

The organization continued operating, despite discovering police surveillance officers over the two-year period, Soave added.

Caruana, 52, of Goldpark Court, Woodbridge, his brother, Pasquale Caruana, 50, of Cunningham Drive, Maple and Domenic Rossi, 68, of Lynette Crescent, Richmond Hill, were to be held in custody overnight for a bail hearing today on drug trafficking and conspiracy charges.

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Note: The AGCO gives the applicant details of any objections.

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