

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of West Virginia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Two Men Sentenced in Marijuana Scheme Through U.S. Postal Service

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. – Two Huntington men who participated in a scheme to mail marijuana from California to Huntington over a period of several years were sentenced yesterday, announced United States Attorney Mike Stuart. James Waylon Molinaro, 44, was sentenced to 78 months in federal prison after previously entering a guilty plea to possession with intent to distribute marijuana. Molinaro also previously pled guilty to prohibited possession of a firearm by a felon stemming from an unrelated investigation. Chris Crookshanks, 43, was sentenced to three years of supervised release during which he must serve 12 weeks of intermittent confinement in jail. Crookshanks previously entered a guilty plea to conspiracy to distribute marijuana.

“The U.S. Postal Service’s “if it fits, it ships” campaign does not apply to illegal drugs” said United States Attorney Mike Stuart. “Unfortunately, the U.S. Mail has become a frequently used method for drug dealers to transport their inventory and, sadly, in this case, a postal service employee was corruptly involved. Law enforcement is keenly aware of the risk of shipments of dangerous drugs in the mail and we are working together to prosecute both the shippers and receivers of illicit drugs. I greatly admire the postal service and their committed employees. Fortunately, we won’t allow a bad apple to sully the orchard.”

Molinaro and Crookshanks admitted that, between 2013 and March of 2018, they and others conspired to distribute marijuana in the Huntington area. During the conspiracy, Molinaro acquired marijuana in California and arranged for it to be shipped through the United States mail from California to Huntington. Once the parcels containing marijuana arrived in Huntington, Molinaro paid multiple postal employees, including Crookshanks who was a letter carrier with the postal service, to deliver the parcels on their assigned delivery routes or to meet Molinaro at other locations to provide the parcels to him.

On March 15, 2018, agents located two parcels at the Huntington Post Office which had been mailed from the State of California to Huntington which were found to contain marijuana. Agents conducting surveillance observed a postal employee load the parcels into a postal delivery truck and drive to the Dollar General store located in the 800 block of Norway Avenue in Huntington. At that location, the postal employee provided the parcels to Molinaro who arrived in a separate vehicle. A trooper with the West Virginia State Police subsequently conducted a traffic stop of Molinaro's vehicle in the 1000 block of 9th Street in Huntington and recovered the parcels. The parcels were found to contain a total of 16 pounds of marijuana which Molinaro admitted that he intended to distribute.

As part of their pleas, Molinaro admitted that he was responsible for the shipment and distribution of at least 100 kilograms of marijuana, and Crookshanks admitted that he was responsible for the delivery of at least 40 kilograms of marijuana, during the conspiracy.

Molinaro had also previously pled guilty to being a felon in possession of a firearm. On July 29, 2018, Molinaro was at a night club on Route 60 in Barboursville when he was asked to leave after a club employee observed him possessing a firearm. Molinaro exited the club, fired multiple shots in the club's parking lot, briefly left the scene, and then returned. A Barboursville police officer responding to a call for assistance at the club subsequently located Molinaro in possession of .38 caliber revolver. Molinaro was prohibited from possessing a firearm based on multiple prior felony convictions for distribution of cocaine and possession of cannabis for sale

The United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the West Virginia State Police – Violent Crime and Drug Task Force West, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and the Barboursville Police Department, conducted the investigation. United States District Judge Robert C. Chambers imposed the sentences. Assistant United States Attorney Joseph F. Adams handled the prosecutions.

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