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County Attorney



**ATF**  
**Phoenix Field Division**

March 4, 2010  
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**Weapons Ring Busted**  
***ATF and County Attorney's Office break up criminal syndicate***

County Attorney Andrew Thomas and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives Special Agent in Charge for the Phoenix Field Division, William D. Newell, announced today that six suspects have been indicted and arrested in connection with an alleged criminal syndicate accused of using straw buyers to purchase vast quantities of weapons.

According to investigators with the ATF, John Suggs (DOB 8/25/82) managed a criminal syndicate since 2003 using young girls to purchase weapons. Suggs is not able to legally purchase weapons because of a previous felony conviction. According to federal investigators, Suggs allegedly provided the straw buyers with cash and a list of guns and/or assault rifles. The straw buyer would then fill out the federal firearms purchase documentation representing that they are purchasing the guns for themselves.

On March 2, 2010 a grand jury indicted Suggs and five other defendants on 28 charges including:

Participating in a Criminal Syndicate

Assisting in a Criminal Syndicate

Forgery

Conspiracy to Commit Forgery

On March 3, 2010 BATF agents arrested the suspects. Deputy County Attorney Alane Roby prosecuted the case

The five other defendants are

Bethany Hanna (DOB 8/16/83)

Rachel Schiavo (DOB 7/16/85)

Michael Scott Ortega (4/6/81)

Alexandra Gittings (8/31/88)

Christianna Millan (5/26/88)

Newell stated, "As an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice ATF's primary mission is to protect our communities from violent criminals and criminal organizations engaging in the illegal use and trafficking of firearms. This investigation focuses on the alleged illegal activities of a violent convicted

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felon who has been using several individuals to illegally purchase firearms for him. Many of these firearms have subsequently been recovered in relation to violent crimes. The ATF Phoenix Field Division greatly appreciates the support and partnership of the Maricopa County Attorney's Office as well as the Phoenix and Mesa Police Departments in addressing the seriousness of these types of criminal activities.

Thomas stated, "We appreciate the ATF's efforts, along with local police, in making sure that convicted felons cannot purchase firearms. That right is reserved for citizens not criminals. It's hoped that this effort will send a message that criminals who arm themselves will be prosecuted."

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