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DECEMBER 11, 2012 TAMPA, FI

TOP STORY: HSI takes down human smuggling organization

It began with a routine traffic stop in Tampa, Fla. On Feb. 4, just after 5 p.m., Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office deputies pulled over 21-year-old Kathleen Roberson. Not only did she not have a valid driver's license, but she was also transporting five illegal aliens in her Kia Sorrento.

Roberson and one of her passengers, Jessica Roland, were transporters for a much larger human smuggling organization that operated out of Arizona and Alabama. The organization transported illegal aliens to final destinations throughout the United States

The sheriff's office and the U.S. Border Patrol notified U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) about the incident. Two days later, HSI initiated an investigation to determine who Roberson and Roland were working for.

"When conducting these investigations, we look for the root of the problem. We were determined to dismantle the larger criminal organization behind the smuggling activity," said Sue McCormick, special agent in charge of HSI Tampa.

Further investigation led HSI to the organization's leadership, including brothers Jose Bartolo Calixto-Moran and Pedro Calixto-Moran, and Pedro's girlfriend Marilu Ramirez-Bartolo. The brothers and Ramirez-Bartolo were all Mexican citizens illegally residing in the United States.

"Human smugglers completely disregard the value of human lives. They transport people across the border like commodities, often in squalid conditions," said McCormick. "We estimate this organization was transporting nearly 80 illegal aliens each month from Phoenix to final destinations across the United States."

As a result of HSI's investigation, the court sentenced Pedro Calixto-Moran to 71 months in prison, Jose Calixto-Moran to 41 months in prison and Ramirez-Bartolo to 27 months in prison for their roles in the human smuggling organization. Roberto Jimenez-Delgado was also sentenced to 33 months in prison for transporting illegal aliens. Roberson and Roland cooperated with the investigation, and as a result, were sentenced to time served.

Learn more about HSI's efforts to combat human smuggling (http://www.ice.gov/human-smuggling/) .

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