

Two charged over cocaine smuggling

Two Quebec residents are to appear for a bail hearing Tuesday in the St-Jean-sur-Richelieu courthouse on charges of conspiracy to import cocaine into Canada from Peru.

Diego Contreras, 36, of St-Hyacinthe, and Jorge Castrillon de Jesus, 21, of Granby, were arrested separately in the Calgary area last week and returned to Montreal under RCMP escort Thursday, an RCMP spokesman said.

It is alleged that the two men, along with two other Quebecers, conspired to import cocaine into Canada through the Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau International Airport, Cpl. Luc Thibault said Tuesday.

The conspiracy investigation was launched last November when Canada Border Services Agency officers discovered just over three kilograms of cocaine concealed in a suitcase with a false bottom compartment at the Montreal airport.

Victor Patino Lucero, 32, of Granby was arrested at the airport by RCMP. Yhonny Estrada Restrepo, 26, of Granby, was subsequently arrested. Separate trial and preliminary hearing dates have been set for those men, Thibault said.

The cocaine seized at the airport originated from Panama. More charges could be laid in this case, investigators said.



DARIO AYALA/THE GAZETTE

Vincent Gericitano, president and founder of the television channel Avis de recherche, says he built the station with his own hands.

CRTC ruling may doom ADR channel

Police strongly support station that broadcasts news on wanted felons and missing people

CHRISTOPHER CURTIS
THE GAZETTE

Vincent Gericitano mortgaged his home to launch the Avis de recherche (ADR) channel on Quebec cable television.

When the bills started piling up, he doubled down on his investment, using his parents' house as collateral so he could keep pumping money into the station.

"It was putting me in the poorhouse and almost putting the people who loved me in the poorhouse," Gericitano told The Gazette. "But I had a dream that ADR could work and for a time it really took off."

Now it appears his gamble may have been in vain as ADR — a station designed to help police find missing people and track down fugitives — saw its renewal application for mandatory carriage rejected by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission in August. Without the \$1.6 million in annual funding ADR collected in mandatory subscriber fees from Videotron and other carriers, Gericitano fears his life's work may go up in smoke.

Police departments across Canada are rallying behind ADR, calling it an essential tool for law enforcement in Quebec. Despite let-

ters from the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs and dozens of victim advocacy groups supporting the Montreal-based cable station, the CRTC stands by its Aug. 8 decision.

The telecommunications regulator says Gericitano's channel can't prove it makes Canada a safer place by broadcasting news on wanted felons and missing people. Furthermore, the CRTC said that in an era with social media and interactive mobile news, a linear medium like television is no longer the most viable means for public-safety awareness. ADR's less than stellar ratings didn't help its case before the CRTC either.

Gericitano is appealing the decision.

"The way I see it is, you never need a smoke detector until your kitchen's on fire," Gericitano said. "This isn't about who sells the most hotdogs, it's about helping people. For the families of victims, for the families of missing children, we're an important ally, we're an essential service."

Before venturing into television in 2002, Gericitano owned a company that manufactured award plaques and other signs. It wasn't until his business was robbed that Gericitano decided to found a cable network with the sole purpose of



ADR.TV WEBSITE

The ADR community TV station publicizes cases of missing people and unsolved crime.

solving the crimes that slip through police investigators' fingers.

To do that he had to pay Videotron upward of \$40,000 each month just to have access to 750,000 subscribers. The station ran on a shoestring budget, limiting its broadcasting to slides of mug shots and missing people.

But that changed in 2007, when the CRTC approved ADR's request for mandatory carriage in Quebec. Under the licensing agreement, the network thrived and Gericitano was able to climb out of the financial hole he'd dug for himself and expand ADR's operations.

ADR hired 10 full-time journalists and began producing original con-

tent that police say became a reference tool for departments throughout Quebec.

"In Quebec, it's the only television station that helps us keep our hope alive," said Pina Arcamone, the director general of Quebec's Missing Children's network in a document released by ADR. "To take away ADR is to take away hope in that glimmer of hope."

Henri Provencher also came out in support of ADR in a statement of support during the CRTC licensing hearings last April. Provencher's granddaughter Cédrika went missing over six years ago, when the 9-year-old was approached by a man who claimed to be searching for his lost dog. She hasn't been seen since.

"When someone takes the time to help you like that, it's a gift from heaven," he said. "The station is an asset for families like ours."

Without the mandatory licensing funding, ADR has had to gut its newsroom, laying off 10 of its 16 employees.

"I had thought that good corporate citizens would step forward to sponsor us, but who wants their company's logo next to a missing kid or a picture of a criminal?" Gericitano said.

"I built this station with my own hands. I installed every wire in that studio, I was on the front lines from Day One. And now it's slipping away."

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SIX STREET-CLEANER TRUCKS TORCHED

Police have launched a criminal investigation in connection with the torching of six commercial vehicles early Tuesday at a business in the industrial sector of Boisbriand. Six street cleaners owned by Groupe Villeneuve Inc., were destroyed in the fire in the parking lot behind businesses on Lafayette St. W. It is not yet known what accelerant was used to set the trucks aflame nor why the fire was set, said Sgt. Martin Charron of the Régie intermunicipale de police Ste-Therese-de-Blainville. "All theories are open at this point," he said. Groupe Villeneuve did not report receiving any threats recently, Charron said. The targeted vehicles were among the 11 commercial vehicles owned by Groupe Villeneuve that were parked behind Transport Jaguar International Inc., company owner Ginette Villeneuve said. The family-owned business has been parking its vehicles there for about four years, she said. She was at a loss to explain the fire, Villeneuve said. Firefighters were called to the scene about 2.30 a.m. About 30 firefighters managed to control the blaze which also caused some damage to employees' vehicles, Charron said.