



Tuesday, October 28, 2008
(Last modified: 2008-10-28 10:07:25)

Source: *The Greeneville Sun*

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A former Cocke County bar operator has pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court here to conspiracy to distribute and to possess, with the intent to distribute, five kilograms or more of a substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine.

Court records said Larry Dobie "Bear" Pruitt, 59, formerly of 1622 West Highway 25-70, Newport, entered a guilty plea on Oct. 16 to one count of an indictment returned against him by a federal grand jury.

The minutes of the Oct. 16 change-of-plea hearing for Pruitt show that U.S. District Judge Ronnie Greer accepted the guilty plea and scheduled a sentencing hearing for Pruitt for 9 a.m. next Feb. 23.

At sentencing, according to the plea agreement filed in the case, Pruitt faces a maximum possible punishment of a mandatory minimum 10 years in federal prison up to life, a fine of \$4 million and from five years to life on supervised probation once he completes his prison sentence.

The plea agreement in the case says that Pruitt, from about the month of October 2006 until on, or about, Sept. 28, 2007, conspired with at least one other person to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute "at least 10, but less than 15, kilograms of a substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine.

"During the period of the conspiracy, Pruitt provided cocaine to his nine co-conspirators that they stored, and or, distributed to customers in the Eastern District of Tennessee," the plea agreement says. "Pruitt allowed the co-conspirators to distribute cocaine from his bar, known as Bear's Bar, his residence, his garage, all located in the Eastern District of Tennessee."

The plea agreement notes that one individual interviewed by agents during the investigation told officers that "about every two weeks" from February 2006 until May 2, 2007, he purchased cocaine from Pruitt at his bar.

"This individual began purchasing ounces of cocaine for \$1,000 per ounce," the plea agreement said.

Between February 2006 and May 2007, the plea agreement said, the interviewed individual said he purchased approximately 14 ounces of cocaine from Pruitt.

Another individual interviewed during the investigation told officers that between October 2006 and April 10, 2007, he sold Pruitt "two to five ounces of cocaine two to three times a week."

The plea agreement said the man who acknowledged selling cocaine to Pruitt estimated that he sold Pruitt "at least 200 ounces, or five and one-half kilograms," of cocaine.

On Dec. 28, 2006, according to the plea agreement, Pruitt was a passenger in a car stopped by the Cocke County sheriff's deputies. Three ounces of cocaine were found under the seat in which he had been sitting, the plea agreement said.

When Pruitt's hands were "wiped with a Securetec Drugwipe II test kit" after the traffic stop, they tested positive

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for cocaine, according to the plea agreement.

Officers also found \$2,600 in cash on Pruitt's person during the traffic stop.

The plea agreement also notes that on seven occasions between Jan. 11, 2007, and Aug. 22, 2007, agents "acting in an undercover capacity, or confidential informants acting at the direction of law enforcement agents, met with Pruitt at his bar, or at his garage in Cocke County and "purchased over eight ounces of cocaine from Pruitt in recorded, or surveilled, transactions."

At Least 14.2 Kilos

The plea agreement says that "conservatively, based on all this information, Pruitt was responsible for the distribution of 14.2 kilograms of cocaine during the period of the conspiracy."

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