

Alleged Black Angels members face federal charges

More than four dozen people with alleged ties to a violent street gang that sold heroin and methamphetamine to support the Mexican Mafia are behind bars facing federal charges, and eight others are being sought, prosecutors said today.

The 27 suspects rounded up today join 25 defendants already in custody in the investigation of the Black Angels, a 450-member Latino street gang that was formed in Ontario more than 50 years ago and claims the entire San Bernardino County city as its turf, according to U.S. Attorney's Office spokesman Thom Mrozek.

Today's arrests were the result of two indictments returned by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles in recent weeks. The main indictment names 50 defendants, three dozen of whom are charged under the Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act, Mrozek said.

In addition to the RICO charges, the indictment alleges violent crimes in aid of racketeering, conspiracies to distribute heroin and methamphetamine and firearms violations.

A second indictment charges another 10 defendants with narcotics trafficking violations.

The lead defendant in the racketeering case is Armando "Mando" Barajas, a 46-year-old suspected Mexican Mafia member who lives in Pomona and allegedly controls the gang's activities, including narcotics distribution, Mrozek said. He was arrested today, the spokesman said.

The Black Angels membership also includes those connected to two subgroups - Ontario Varrío Sur and Junior Black Angels, Mrozek said. The indictment alleges that Black Angels leaders recruited and initiated juveniles to join the gang by visiting high schools in search of potential members.

The Black Angels gang is allegedly aligned with the Mexican Mafia, and there are at least four Mexican Mafia members in the gang, according to the indictment.

Along with the distribution of narcotics, leaders of the gang extorted "taxes" from local drug dealers in exchange for permission to operate in gang-regulated areas, the indictment alleges.

The group's drug trafficking activities also include smuggling narcotics into prisons for the benefit of incarcerated Mexican Mafia and Black Angels members, according to prosecutors.

The RICO conspiracy count in the indictment alleges a series of specific overt acts, including the possession of one pound of methamphetamine; transporting narcotics from Mexico into the United States; shooting at police during a high-speed chase; an armed robbery of a convenience store; and the murder of a Black Angels member who ran afoul of the gang, Mrozek said.