

Federal Indictment Targets Drew Street Crime Family

A multi-agency task force of 500 law enforcement officers swooped down on members of the Avenues gang on Drew Street early Wednesday morning. The crackdown netted 32 members or associates of the “Drew Street” clique of the Avenues.

The operation, which began at 4 a.m., stemmed from a massive 157-page federal racketeering indictment targeting 70 members of the gang who lived on Drew Street in northeast Los Angeles. Federal and local law enforcement officers served 25 federal search warrants, and picked up 32 Avenues gang members and associates in the pre-dawn raids. Twenty-six of the gang members who were indicted were already in local and federal custody including [Maria “Chata” Leon](#) who is reputed to be the matriarch of a large family of drug dealing gang members.

The indictment of Leon and her extended family for mostly drug related charges was a coup for local law enforcement officials who spent years trying to break up the control the family had over the Drew Street community.

Leon’s family members are affiliated with the [Avenues](#) gang. The Avenues take their name from the numbered corridors that slice through Figueroa Street, Highland Park’s bustling yet economically poor main drag, home to Mexican grocery stores, check-cashing businesses, nail salons, swap meets, car washes, fast-food joints and a smattering of Mexican restaurants, galleries and nightclubs with a citywide draw.

The Avenues have cliques, each of which claims a gang territory based on where gang members live. The four main cliques are 43rd Aves, Avenues 57, Cypress Avenues, and Drew Street, all centered on the streets for which they are named. Members of the 43rd Aves were prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office in 2006 for hate-crime charges for harassing and attacking African Americans in Highland Park.

Leon, a young toughie from a rough, lawless Mexican village in Guerrero State settled on Drew Street in 1985 and gave birth to 13 children — including Jose Leon, Danny Leon, Nicolas Real, Randy Martinez, Francisco Real and Jesus Martinez. Leon dealt drugs and staked her claim on Drew Street, in a three-bedroom house stocked with guns and explosives.

On Wednesday, federal authorities indicted Leon and her sons Jose, Nicolas, Francisco and Jesus. Also indicted was Jesus Israel Martinez, the father of Randy and Jesus.

Her son, Danny Leon, died in a gun battle with Los Angeles Police Department gang officers in February. Cypress Park gang members killed her son Randy Martinez last year.

Over the years, Leon did stints in jail and prison, and her growing brood, the extended Leon

crime family slowly turned Drew Street into a hellish micro community that L.A. cops, politicians and code enforcers could not turn around.

Her longest stint in prison came after a Halloween bust in 2002, when the Glendale Police Department used a search warrant to enter her longtime home. She was arrested for narcotics sales and child endangerment after officers found automatic weapons and explosives throughout the home — where she was also raising young children.

Law enforcement officers arrested her son, Francisco “Pancho” Real, the leader of the gang and the lead defendant in the indictment, at his home in Glendale. According to prosecutors, Mexican Mafia members authorized Francisco to take control of the Drew-Estara neighborhood last summer.

In 2003, Francisco was convicted of accessory to murder in the killing of a local man who was shot to death in front of Leon’s home – an apparent drug deal gone bad. Inside the house, the cops discovered a shrine to the patron saint of narco trafficking, Jesus Malverde, a folklore hero in crime-ridden Sinaloa. While in Los Angeles County jail on the accessory to murder charge, Francisco was arrested along with fellow inmates for the stabbing death of an inmate. The case was later dropped by the district attorney's office.

Earlier, around 2000, Francisco did a short stint in federal prison for illegal alien smuggling.

According to the federal indictment, Francisco brought in \$1,200 a day in drug money. The day after his brother Danny’s death, Francisco, who was being wiretapped by federal authorities, shrugged it off saying, “shit happens.” A month later, he was back in business. He ordered the owner of a tire shop to pay him \$30,000 within 24 hours or he would kill him and burn down his shop, according to the indictment. When the owner balked, Francisco told the tire owner that he was doing business in Francisco’s territory.

Maria Leon's oldest son Nicolas Real was indicted for racketeering, conspiracy to distribute narcotics, and the attempted murder of a family in July of 2007. According to a law enforcement officer, Nicolas pointed a gun at a family who was lost in the Drew Street neighborhood after the driver honked at him because he was blocking traffic. One of the victims told police that Nicolas said: “Don't you know who I am?” He was arrested by the LAPD for assault with a deadly weapon.

Earlier, Nicolas was arrested for driving around Franklin High School threatening people with a handgun and illegal alien smuggling along with his brother Francisco.

In 2005, Nicolas was arrested by the Maywood Police Department on three counts of attempted murder after a shooting at the El Potero Club that left a fellow Avenues gangster a paraplegic.

Leon’s son Jose was arrested on November 26, 2007 for a string of robberies in the Highland Park area committed with a machine gun. His partner/cousin Sergio Martinez – a known drug seller at the Drew Street house was also arrested. Martinez was also named in the indictment.

Maria Leon was released from state prison in 2006 and was immediately deported by immigration officials. Her house on Drew Street was targeted by the City Attorney's Office as a

nuisance abatement property after they found drugs and guns inside. The rest of her family was forced to leave.

Two days after Danny's death, Francisco arranged for his mother and her property to be smuggled back into the United States. He advised his 44-year-old mother "that she would need to be prepared to walk part of the distance." On February 27, Francisco Real was trying to find a false identification for his mother, according to the indictment. Early the following morning, a friend of Francisco's drove Leon back into the United States in Francisco's Toyota Camry.

Once back in Los Angeles, rumors abounded that Leon regularly visited her son Danny's grave at the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale. In April, immigration authorities caught up with Leon in front of her former house on Drew Street and charged her with reentering the country illegally. Leon, who was in federal custody, was indicted on numerous drug charges including distributing crack cocaine along Drew Street. The Internal Revenue Service confiscated her second home in Victorville.