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NEWS RELEASE
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**TWO BANNING MEN ENTER GUILTY PLEAS
IN ILLEGAL UNLICENSED CANNABIS DISPENSARY CASE**

RIVERSIDE – Two Banning men who illegally operated an unlicensed cannabis dispensary – twice -- entered guilty pleas today, Dec. 19, 2019, to felony conspiracy to possess cannabis for sale.

This is the first conviction in a case investigated by the DA's Bureau of Investigation Cannabis Regulation Task Force.

Arturo Rosa Gonzalez, DOB: 8-13-78, and Jose Alfredo Vazquez, DOB: 7-27-93, each pled guilty to one count of felony conspiracy to possess cannabis for sale and one count of unlawfully failing to file sales tax returns. Under a plea agreement with the DA's Office, each was sentenced by Judge Becky Dugan to 180 days in custody and three years of formal probation.

From September 2018 to May 2019, Gonzalez and Vazquez illegally operated an unlicensed cannabis dispensary on South 1st Street in Banning.

Initially, the men called the illegal unlicensed dispensary Cannabliss. The DA's Cannabis Regulation Task Force (CRTF) served a search warrant there in November 2018, seizing evidence and issuing an order to stop doing business. However, the two men reopened an illegal unlicensed dispensary at the same location, this time calling it Banning's Finest. CRTF served another search warrant there in May 2019.

The purpose of the Cannabis Regulation Task Force, which is led by the DA's Bureau of Investigation, is to protect properly licensed legal cannabis businesses and enforce regulatory requirements which protect the environment and consumers.

The aim of the task force is not to shut down legally operating facilities, but rather to ensure fair business practices and keep criminal activity out of the legal cannabis industry and out of our communities. When dispensaries operate without following the law or regulations, their unfair business practices impact those dispensaries which are obeying the law. Illegal or unlicensed dispensaries also may be providing customers with untested and potentially harmful products.

Agencies currently on the task force include the DA's Bureau of Investigation, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, the Hemet Police Department, the Riverside Police Department, the Temecula Police Department, the Murrieta Police Department, the Palm Springs Police Department, and the Riverside County Code Enforcement Department.

The case, BAF1900889, was prosecuted by Deputy DA Lauren Dossey of the DA's Consumer Protection Team.

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