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The Palm Beach Post

LATEST: Palm Beach County men arrested on federal drug charges

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Two men have been arrested in Palm Beach County on federal drug charges for allegedly importing, producing and distributing thousands of counterfeit pain pills that contained substances including fentanyl.

At least two homes in Wellington, another in West Palm Beach and a warehouse in Royal Palm Beach were used in the scheme, which employed “presses” to manufacture thousands of pills that would “mimic the likeness of pharmaceutical opioids ...,” according to a federal indictment made public Wednesday.

Ross Riker, 34, of Loxahatchee, and Adam O. DeBarry, 35, of Greenacres, are facing charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute a controlled substance, conspiracy to import a controlled substance into the U.S. and possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute.

Federal investigators learned of their involvement in the scheme after searching the Wellington home of Emerson and Nicole Benjoi on June 14, 2017.

Emerson Benjoi (Photo provided by the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office)

Authorities believe Emerson Benjoi fled to his native Brazil, where he has dual citizenship and cannot be extradited to the U.S. Nicole Benjoi was sentenced Jan. 30 to 30 months in prison and three years of probation.

Nicole Benjoi was the former head of the special education department at Lake Worth Middle School.

After her arrest, Benjoi spoke to federal prosecutors about the role of her husband and others, including Riker and DeBarry, in the drug-trafficking scheme.

The operation involved importing controlled substances — fentanyl, alprazolam, GBL and steroids — from China, then using pill presses to compress the substances into tablet form, according to the indictment.

The shipments from China, paid for in Bitcoin, were sent to a UPS store in Wellington where a post office box was rented using a stolen identity.

The Wellington-based operation netted hundreds of thousands of dollars, the indictment said.

Federal authorities quoted Nicole Benjoi as saying her husband and Riker “often spoke about making one million dollars each by producing and selling drugs ...”

Federal agents served a search warrant on the Benjoi's home on June 14 and found more than \$400,000 in cash, firearms, 229 grams of fentanyl, 508 grams of alprazolam powder, a money counter, a pill counter and detailed drug ledgers.

According to the ledgers, Benjoi sold 97,719 fentanyl tablets and 23,110 counterfeit Xanax tablets between May 26, 2016 and June 12, 2017.

The indictment states that Emerson Benjoi, Riker and DeBarry converted fentanyl power into counterfeit oxycodone and Percocet tablets, and alprazolam and etizolam powder into counterfeit Xanax tablets. They also sold GBL, a liquid known as “coma in a bottle,” that gives users a sense of euphoria similar to MDMA, also known as ecstasy or Molly.

Fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid, can kill in amounts equivalent to a few grains of salt.

Based on their telephone communication, the men appeared well aware of the damage the drugs caused.

On March 26, 2016, Riker texted Benjono a link to a [Tampa Bay Times story](#) quoting Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri saying that counterfeit Xanax pills had killed nine people, according to the indictment.

The next day, Benjono sent Riker a link to another news story stating that a “super pill” -- the fentanyl-laced counterfeit Xanax tablet -- was “killing users in droves.”

Riker allegedly used his mother’s home in West Palm Beach to manufacture the counterfeit pills. The operation then moved to DeBarry’s apartment in Wellington before neighbors began complaining about noise coming from the pill-pressing machines, forcing another move to a warehouse in Royal Palm Beach.

The investigation into the drug operation was conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security and the Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office.