

Ashe County Man Convicted in Fed Drug Case

Written by Steve Frank
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An Ashe County man has been convicted by a Charlotte jury who returned a guilty verdict Friday against Martin Martinez Saldana, 44, of West Jefferson, following a four day trial, according to Anne M. Tompkins, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina. Saldana was convicted of conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine and possession of an illegal short-barreled shotgun. U.S. Attorney Tompkins and Sheriff James Williams of the Ashe County Sheriff's Office along with many other agencies made the announcement. According to court documents and evidence introduced at trial, from as early as 2011 through the end of 2012, Saldana and his co-conspirators distributed in Ashe County and elsewhere more than 20 pounds of near-pure crystal methamphetamine, also known as "ice." According to trial evidence, the high level of purity of the methamphetamine indicates it originated from a Mexican "super lab" and had an estimated street-level value of more than \$1million. The evidence at trial also established that when law enforcement executed a search warrant at Saldana's residence they seized four handguns, including a revolver hidden under his mattress, and an illegal short-barreled shotgun, as well as ammunition. Over the course of the investigation, law enforcement also seized five real properties in Ashe County worth over \$500,000 combined, \$50,000 in cash, one vehicle, one-quarter kilogram of methamphetamine "ice" and drug packaging materials. Among the seized items also were three images of Santa Muerte, who has been adopted by drug traffickers as folk "patron saint." Law enforcement arrested Saldana on December 12, 2012, as he was planning to leave for Mexico. He has been in federal custody since his arrest and will remain in custody until his sentencing date, which has not yet been set. The charges levied against Saldana carry a statutory mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years to life in prison, and a fine of up to \$10,000,000.