

## National HIDTA Awards

**CATEGORY:** Investigative Involving a Violent Organization

**HIDTA:** Oregon-Idaho HIDTA

**INITIATIVE OR INDIVIDUAL:** Metro Safe Streets Task Force, Multnomah County, Oregon

**SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATION:** Investigation is an approved multi-agency OCDETF (PA-OR-252) sponsored by the Portland FBI. Partner agencies: Portland Police Bureau, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, Homeland Security Investigations, Gresham Police Department, Multnomah County Parole and Probation, Multnomah County District Attorney's Office, U.S. Attorney's Office District of Oregon, Eugene Police Department and Oregon State Police

**SUMMARY:** The Metro Safe Streets Task Force conducted a racketeering investigation into the Hoover Criminal Gang which resulted in the seizure of 44 firearms, controlled substances, and approximately 38 indictments for the Hoovers or Hoover associates for charges including RICO Conspiracy, VICAR Murder, Drug Trafficking, Sex Trafficking, and Felon in Possession of a Firearm. In September 2022, two defendants went to trial with three charges of VICAR murder and RICO Conspiracy which alleged 17 acts involving murder, six robberies, and seven drug trafficking incidents over a 30-year span. Both defendants were convicted and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

**NARRATIVE:** *Operation Bust a Groove* – In 2019, the Metro Safe Streets Task Force initiated a racketeering investigation into the Hoover Criminal Gang. Hoovers in the Portland metro-area consist primarily of 107 Hoovers and 74 Hoovers. Collectively, the Hoovers have been one of the more active and violent gangs in Portland over the past 30 years. Experienced gang investigators familiar with the Portland Hoovers estimate approximately 200 Hoover Criminal Gang members and associates in the Portland metro-area.

Starting in 2019 and continuing through 2022, federal investigators and prosecutors worked to target violent members of the Hoover Criminal Gang. Given the massive spike in gun violence in Portland during that same period, the law enforcement community came together to focus state and federal resources on the most active gang, the one causing those major increases in shootings, assaults, and robberies. Not only was this gang responsible for spiking gun violence in Portland, but investigators were seeing a trend in which members of this Hoover Criminal Gang were committing violent acts (including shootings) in Washington, Nevada, Arizona, California, and in towns just outside of Portland like Gresham and Vancouver, Washington. Due to their violent reputation, members of the Hoover Criminal Gang were virtually immune from prosecution due to witnesses being too terrified to cooperate with police and testify in court.

In June 2020, investigators were involved in a RICO Title III wiretap of a Hoover gang member Timothy Smith, aka "Big Rhage" for RICO conspiracy, firearms trafficking and human trafficking. The result of the Title III was six premises search warrants, four arrests and 11 firearms seized.

During the wiretap, investigators observed the Hoovers were involved in a phenomenon called “Internet Gangbanging.” Gang members, including Hoovers, in the Portland area will post gang related photos and videos on social media to tout their own gang and to disparage rivals. Investigators initiated a Group II Online Undercover Operation (UCO) focusing on the social media platforms used by Hoovers. Investigators targeted Hoover gang members believed to have been involved in skyrocketing gun violence in Portland. In a six-month period, investigators executed over 50 search warrants for firearms related offenses, seized 32 firearms, over \$23,000 in cash, and cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and fentanyl pills along with over 20 arrests.

In total, 38 Hoover members and associates were indicted on federal charges ranging from firearms related offenses, robberies, drug trafficking, and sex trafficking of a minor. As a result of these indictments, wiretaps, Group II, strong state and federal law enforcement cooperation and other enforcement steps, investigators were able convince several Hoovers and other gang members to testify to federal RICO offenses. Federal prosecutors sought and obtained approval from the Organized Crime and Gang Section (OCGS) to indict six additional individuals with federal RICO offenses. The RICO Conspiracy spanned 30 years of conduct including 17 acts involving murder, six robberies, and seven drug trafficking incidents.

In September 2022, investigators completed a seven-week racketeering trial of two Hoover members, Ronald Rhodes, aka “Big Fly”, and Lorenzo Jones, aka “Low Down”. The trial included over 120 witnesses, including six cooperating defendants, and hundreds of exhibits. Both defendants were convicted of RICO Conspiracy and VICAR murder. In October 2023, Rhodes and Jones were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.