

Force nabs 116 lbs. of pot

Officers with the Grand Valley Joint Drug Task Force made their biggest single drug bust of the year when they discovered 116 pounds of marijuana stuffed in vacuum-sealed bags in the front fenders of a car.

The pot has a street value of around \$116,000, said Tim Grimsby, operations sergeant with the task force.

Authorities arrested Antonio Delacruz, 23, and Maritza Palominos, who turns 20 today, and held them in the Mesa County Jail on suspicion of possession of marijuana with the intent to distribute. They also were held on suspicion of immigration violations and special offender charges for allegedly importing more than 100 pounds of drugs into Colorado, said Mesa County Sheriff's Department spokeswoman Wendy Likes.

Friday at about 8:30 a.m., task force officer Mike Miller stopped a 1989 Chevrolet sedan that was eastbound on Interstate

70 at milepost 18 near Fruita. Miller said he pulled the car over because he could not see the license plate.

The occupants appeared nervous, Grimsby said, but they agreed to a police search of the car.

Miller's trained canine alerted the officer to the odor of drugs coming from the right front fender, according to the arrest affidavit.

Delacruz and Palominos, both with California addresses, agreed to allow authorities to search the car at the county shops. There, officers discovered 116 pounds of a substance that tested positive for marijuana. The marijuana was found in the front fender wells of the car.

"This wasn't destined for Grand Junction," Grimsby said.

The two later said they were paid \$1,000 to drive the car to Tennessee, the affidavit said. They will be held without bond until their arraignment.

The Grand Valley Joint

Drug Task Force confiscated a total of \$132,000 worth of drugs in January, Grimsby said.

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Drugs confiscated by law enforcement are taken to the Persigo Wastewater Treatment Plant and mixed with raw sewage, Grimsby said.

The Environmental Protection Agency does not allow law enforcement to burn illegal drugs because it may put toxins in the air and affect people negatively, Grimsby said.

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