

West Orange Drug Suspect Arrested in Belleville

Belleville – Following a motor vehicle stop last night, an alleged West Orange drug distributor was arrested by Essex County sheriff's officers.

Sheriff Armando Fontoura stated that Officers Giuseppe Forgione and David Cohen were assigned to a seatbelt enforcement detail at Mill Street and Union Avenue at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday when they observed a 2001 Acura TL with tinted windows and a plastic cover obstructing the rear license plate.

Fontoura said that the officers pulled the vehicle over and when the driver, Efrain Nieves, age 31, of West Orange rolled down the window Forgione and Cohen detected the strong odor of burnt marijuana emanating from the Acura.

Nieves could not produce a certificate of vehicle insurance and when questioned about the odor the suspect admitted that he had smoked marijuana in the car earlier in the day.

Nieves was patted down for weapons and advised the officers that he had no drugs in his possession, voluntarily allowing the officers to search his car. When Nieves opened the car's trunk Officer Forgione noticed an unzipped black leather pouch containing a large amount of United States currency.

An inspection of the pouch revealed \$3,573 in cash, mostly in \$10 and \$20 bills. The pouch also contained one-half pound of marijuana which was packaged in plastic bags for street distribution and 78 Ecstasy tablets.

The sheriff said that the officers advised Nieves that a narcotics-detecting K-9 was enroute to the scene. At that point, the suspect declared that there was additional marijuana hidden in a laundry detergent bottle in the trunk of the car. The total estimated street value of the narcotics is \$5,000.

Nieves was charged with two counts each of possession of a controlled dangerous substance (marijuana and Ecstasy), possession of CDS with intent to distribute, possession of CDS with intent to distribute within 1000 feet of Public School #8, and possession of CDS with intent to distribute within 500 feet of Branch Brook Park. Nieves was additionally issued a motor vehicle summons for operating a vehicle with illegally tinted windows.

Belleville municipal court Judge Karen Smith ordered Nieves held at the Essex County Correctional Facility for arraignment in lieu of \$10,000 bail.