



QUARTZSITE POLICE DEPARTMENT

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On Saturday evening of July 4, 2015, Quartzsite Police Department (QPD) Officer Keynan Weltha was conducting proactive holiday enforcement and noticed a suspicious vehicle in a local business parking lot. Officer Weltha stopped the vehicle in the McDonald's parking lot. The driver of a black Honda Civic was acting suspicious and could not provide a valid Texas driver's license, registration or proof of insurance. QPD Canine Officer Ruben Villafana and K-9 Wodan arrived on scene to assist Officer Weltha. The driver admitted to driving across the port of entry from Juarez, Mexico into El Paso, Texas. He was traveling to California and also had a misdemeanor warrant for his arrest out of New Mexico, but it was not extraditable in Arizona. Officer Weltha was told by the driver he could search the black Honda Civic. Prior to the search, the driver admitted to having over \$30,000 in US Currency in the vehicle.

Canine Officer Ruben Villafana and K-9 Wodan searched the vehicle and Wodan alerted to the passenger compartment of the black Honda Civic where they located inside a blue bag a large amount of US Currency. Officers later counted the cash totaling \$31,000. The driver was identified as **Francisco Antonio Villa**. Mr. Villa admitted to bringing the US Currency across the Mexico-US border without reporting it to the US authorities in violation of federal laws and reporting requirements to include but not limited to Money Laundering. Suspect Villa told officers and detectives he was going to purchase "Bit Coins" in California. Suspect Villa was arrested and charged with the Arizona's Money Laundering statues along with criminal traffic violations for driving on a revoked/suspended driver's license. While placing suspect Villa under arrest, Officer Weltha located an additional \$1,195 in cash found inside Villa's wallet. Also, Officers located and seized a cell phone, bank documents, and two laptop computers for evidence.

QPD officers and detectives interviewed suspect Villa and his story did not add up. Suspect Villa admitted to having current family members in Federal Prison for drug smuggling. Detectives Mike Lancaster and Hilario Tanakeyowma contacted the Department of Homeland Security, Group Supervisor Russell Bash out of Yuma, Arizona. They were requesting his assistance for expert

advice with the usage and purchase of “Bit Coins”. Mr. Russell Bash had Special Agents contact QPD and provided them with information. Suspect Villa was booked into the La Paz County Jail, and his vehicle was towed to the QPD impound lot.

Detective Lancaster authored search warrants for the vehicle and computers. On July 17, 2015, QPD Detective Lancaster turned over the \$31,000 in US Currency and laptop computers to Special Agents from the Department of Homeland Security out of Yuma. QPD will release the remaining \$1,195 in cash to the suspect Villa at a later date per court approval.

Chief Ernie Renfro of the Quartzsite Police Department would like to thank our law enforcement partners from the Department of Homeland Security in Yuma, Arizona for their expert assistance with this case.

FRANCISCO ANTONIO VILLA



The Quartzsite PD is dedicated to working with the community and other law enforcement agencies to protect our citizens and community.

Ernie Renfro

Chief of Police

Town of Quartzsite

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