

11 arrested during ICE-led joint operation in Myrtle Beach, S.C., targeting gangs

Arrests include members and associates of 18th Street, Latin Kings, and Sur13 street gangs

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. - Nine foreign-born gang members and associates and two U.S. citizens with ties to local violent street gangs were arrested here Wednesday following U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)-led investigation.

The operation, dubbed Community Shield, was a multi-agency effort spearheaded by ICE. Among the participating agencies were the Myrtle Beach Police Department's Gang Unit, 15th Circuit Drug Enforcement Unit, Myrtle Beach Police Department's Street Crimes Unit, North Myrtle Beach Police Department, State Law Enforcement Division Gang Intelligence Team (State Police), Horry County Sheriff's Office and Horry County Police Department.

The operation targeted foreign-born members and associates of 18th Street, Sur 13 and Latin Kings street gangs.

Of those arrested, five are nationals of Honduras, four are from Mexico and two are U.S. citizens. All aliens were found to be illegally present in the United States and are now in ICE custody, with the exception of a juvenile from Mexico who was remanded to the care of a family member.

"Public safety is a significant part of ICE's role in protecting the homeland, but it is also a shared law enforcement mission," said Patrick McDavid, resident agent in charge of ICE's Office of Investigations in Charleston. "ICE works closely with other federal, state, and local law enforcement partners to keep our communities safe, which in this case is the removal of criminal gang members and others who threaten the safety of our neighborhoods."

"This operation was successful due to the diligence of our local, state, and federal law enforcement officers working as a team to identify, arrest, and remove these criminals from our communities. While realistically, this is a drop in the bucket in relation to the totality of the problem locally with illegal immigration and the crime associated with it, it is a significant step that demonstrates the ability of law enforcement to work cooperatively and effectively on a common goal. The community can expect to see more of this in the future as we move to dismantle these organized street gangs who are committing serious crimes along the Grand Strand," said Chief Warren Gall.

Transnational gangs pose a growing public safety threat to communities throughout the country. It is estimated that there are more 900 different gangs in the United States. These gangs no

longer own turf in just the inner city but have spread their criminal networks throughout suburban and rural communities.

These transnational street gangs have a significant number of foreign-born members and are frequently involved in human and contraband smuggling, immigration violations and other crimes. Like any street gang, these transnational gangs also have a propensity toward violence. Their members commit many types of crimes including robbery, extortion, assault, rape, and murder.

Operation Community Shield is an ongoing national initiative in which ICE partners with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to address the significant public safety threat posed by transnational street gangs. Partnerships with local law enforcement agencies are essential to the success of the initiative, and they help further ensure officer safety during the operations.

Since ICE began Operation Community Shield in February 2005, more than 12,200 gang members belonging to more than 900 different gangs have been arrested nationwide.