

NEWS

## Women suspected of trafficking four Modesto brothers for marijuana grow

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Two women were arrested on suspicion of kidnapping and enslaving four brothers from Modesto by forcing them to work in a remote marijuana-growing site in Calaveras County, the Sheriff's Office announced Wednesday.

The men were beaten and held captive for six months under the threat of violence toward them and their family members and physically restrained for a period of time until they escaped July 27, traveling all night to get to a home in West Point to ask for help, sheriff's Capt. Jim Macedo said.

Three of the men were injured from being beaten; all were taken to hospitals and one was taken to a trauma center due to the severity of his injuries.

The victims told detectives they had been held hostage since February and they were beaten while being forced to work in a large marijuana cultivation site off Bald Mountain Road.

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Two of the brothers told investigators they were picked up by a woman, later identified as Guadalupe Sierra Arellano, at a doughnut shop in an unincorporated area of Modesto that was frequented by day laborers looking for work, Macedo said.

The brothers went with Arellano, believing they'd be working on a home landscaping project.

They were brought to a home in West Point to work for a few days before being taken by force to the marijuana cultivation site, Macedo said.

Arellano obtained the victims' home address in Modesto. She went there and told family members the victims were working for her and involved in growing marijuana. She offered to take two additional family members to see the other two victims but threatened that if they reported anything to law enforcement the family members would be killed, according to Macedo.

Two additional brothers went with Arellano to the home near West Point to see if their family members were safe. Like the first pair of brothers, they were threatened by armed men and taken to the marijuana farm. The remaining family in Modesto was also being threatened, Macedo said.

In the days leading up to their escape, the victims were beaten for complaining about the conditions of their captivity. The night before their escape, authorities said, they heard a male captor ask Arellano if they could kill the victims. Arellano reportedly said not to kill the victims until after the marijuana was harvested.

During this time, one of the male captors attempted to stab one of the victims. The captor was holding a knife and gun at the same time.

On July 28, SWAT teams from Calaveras and Tuolumne counties, Calaveras County sheriff's detectives, the FBI, the Bureau of Land Management, Cal Fire and the Angels Camp Police Department served a search warrant at the site from which the men escaped.

Over 23,000 plants with an estimated street value of more than \$18 million were located.

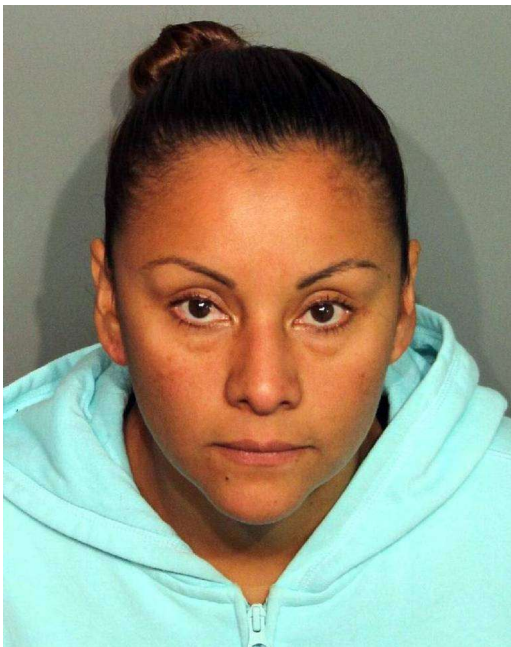
During the search, a man ran from investigators. Investigators found a backpack carrying a handgun along the trail on which he fled.

No arrests were made at the time the search warrant was served, and the investigation continued. Over the next several weeks, authorities served search warrants at locations in Stanislaus County connected to the suspects.

Arellano and Medarda Urbieto were arrested on Sept. 14 on suspicion of human trafficking, kidnapping, battery, making terrorist threats, possession of marijuana for sale and cultivation of marijuana. Both are in the country illegally, authorities said.

Investigators are also seeking several men in connection with the case.

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Medarda Urbieto Estudillo. **Calaveras County Sheriffs Dept.** - Calaveras County Sheriffs Dept.

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