



KENNETH MAGIDSON

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY
HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

Nov. 14, 2008

**DPS Press Conference 2:30 p.m. Today (Friday, Nov. 14)
DPS Regional Headquarters, 12230 West Rd.
Contact: DPS: 281-517-1300**

DA Announces Arrests in DPS-led Bust of Major Dogfighting Ring

(Houston, TX) – District Attorney Kenneth Magidson announced charges against 55 defendants and the seizure of more than 100 dogs in Harris County Friday, to end what is believed to be one of the largest dogfighting operations in the United States.

The Texas Department of Public Safety's Criminal Intelligence Service headed the year-long investigation into the major dog-fighting ring based in the county. It spread through an area that ranges from Tyler to the north and Matagorda County to the southwest.

Investigators said Harris County fights would be staged weekly or twice monthly at one of eight secluded sites. They attracted crowds ranging from 15 to 100 spectators, and included wagering on the outcomes.

Assistant District Attorneys Belinda Smith and Stephen St. Martin coordinated the investigation, which began with a tip from an informant.

Other agencies directly involved in the investigation include the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Office of Inspector General (OIG), and the county's Public Health and Environmental Services, Houston Humane Society, County Precincts 1 and 5 Constables' Offices, and the Office of Precinct 3 County Commissioner Steve Radack.

"This is the largest dog fighting investigation that USDA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) has worked in the Southwest," said Abelino Farias Jr., the USDA's Special Agent in Charge. "The arrests that resulted could not have been achieved without effective cooperation between the Harris County District Attorney's Office, DPS, and OIG's Investigations office."

There were 41 felony charges filed, primarily for engaging in dogfighting, which can result in a punishment of up to two years in state jail. There were 45 other charges filed for the Class A Misdemeanor of being a spectator at a dogfight, an offense punishable by up to one year in county jail and \$4,000 fine.

St. Martin is with the DA's Major Offender Division. Smith – an Assistant District Attorney in the Environmental Crimes Division -- is the office specialist in animal-related prosecutions. They said the dogfighting ring had evaded enforcement earlier by staging fights at secluded sites and only admitting those known personally by the group.

(End)