

Saturday, March 29, 2008 (SF Chronicle)

**3 plead guilty in Florida steroid case/Clinic operators
client list includes many top athletes**

(03-29) 04:00 PDT Albany, N.Y. --

Three operators of a South Florida wellness clinic whose vast client list for performance-enhancing drugs included many top professional sports figures have pleaded guilty to criminal charges.

The three also agreed to cooperate in the ongoing investigation, which is based in Albany.

Glenn Stephanos, 51, and his brother, George Stephanos, 61, both of Jupiter, Fla., hugged and consoled each other outside a second-floor Albany County courtroom moments before entering their guilty pleas in front of acting state Supreme Court Justice Dan Lamont.

The brothers' prescription drug company, Palm Beach Rejuvenation Center in Jupiter, Fla., was raided 13 months ago by a drug task force that had joined ranks with New York Health Department investigators. The company's vice president, Joseph Raich, and a consulting physician, Dr. Robert Carlson, who signed many of the fraudulent prescriptions, both pleaded guilty to felony charges last year.

"This should put them out of business," Albany County Assistant District Attorney Christopher Baynes said.

In the past year, numerous pro athletes were identified as customers of Palm Beach Rejuvenation Center through published reports, including in the Albany Times Union and its sister Hearst Corp. paper, The Chronicle.

The athletes who purchased steroids, human growth hormone or both included New England Patriots all-pro safety Rodney Harrison, Dallas Cowboys quarterbacks coach Wade Wilson, Cleveland Indians pitcher Paul Byrd, journeyman (and former A's) outfielder Jose Guillen, retired (and former Giants) third baseman Matt Williams and right-handed pitcher Ismael Valdez, according to the published reports.

The revelations about pro athletes have brought representatives from the NFL, Major League Baseball and World Wrestling Entertainment - all of which prohibit use of performance-enhancing drugs - to the doorstep of the Albany County district attorney's office in the past year.

Under plea deals, the Stephanos brothers will avoid jail sentences because they have agreed to testify against several remaining defendants, including the owners and operators of Signature Compounding Pharmacy in Orlando, which prosecutors have identified as the primary target of their sprawling investigation.

At that time, the investigation was beginning to break open as an Albany County grand jury had begun handing up indictments against people in four states accused of helping funnel millions of dollars worth of prescription drugs into New York.

Glenn Stephanos faces five years' probation at his sentencing in June and agreed to forfeit \$350,000 cash to prosecutors.

George Stephanos and Ryan Dumas, a heavily muscled Florida resident who investigators said had no formal medical training but carried the title of medical director, both pleaded guilty Thursday to misdemeanor drug conspiracy charges and were fined \$1,000 each. They also agreed to cooperate.

As part of their plea agreements, the Stephanos brothers agreed to refrain from selling prescription drugs, including steroids and human growth hormone, in New York state.

The pleas brought the amount of money seized or forfeited by 14 defendants convicted in the case to almost \$1 million, making it the single largest forfeiture case on record in Albany County. Prosecutors said the money, some of which will be turned over to the state, will be used to fund anti-drug and anti-crime programs.

The Palm Beach Rejuvenation Center was the cornerstone supplier of business to Signature Compounding Pharmacy, prosecutors said. Glenn Stephanos was the company's co-founder, George Stephanos its marketing director.

The business, which billed itself as a medical consulting center, was no more than a boiler room for an Internet-fueled prescription drug operation, prosecutors said.

It allegedly supplied millions of dollars in pre-signed prescription drug orders - mostly for steroids - to Signature Pharmacy, according to court records and earlier statements from prosecutors.

Four people from Signature Pharmacy face trial in coming weeks, with the prospect that nearly all of the other people indicted in the case, including four doctors, have pleaded guilty and agreed to testify against them.