

Tacony man gets 27 years in prison for part in cocaine ring

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For a self-trained mechanic who was born in the Dominican Republic, became a naturalized citizen here in December 2005 and later worked for US Airways as a fleet service agent, it was a stunning fall from grace.

By March 2006, federal prosecutors said Richard Moquete was buying and selling hundreds of thousands of dollars of cocaine in Philadelphia he acquired from a Mexican-based drug trafficking organization. Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael Lowe said Moquete, who was sentenced to 27-years in a federal lockup Monday, was the organization's only cocaine distributor in Philadelphia, and was "personally responsible" for the distribution of hundreds, if not thousands, of kilograms of cocaine to his customers here and the return of millions of dollars in cocaine proceeds.

Moquete and co-defendant Tony Granado, who is to be sentenced Tuesday, were convicted of drug conspiracy, distribution and related offenses after a two-week jury trial in January. (Granado faces a 20-year mandatory minimum sentence.) Authorities said Moquete, 35, would typically meet members of the drug trafficking organization at his Tacony home on Jackson Street near Robbins where he would pay for and usually receive the cocaine. The evidence at trial included testimony of a cooperating defendant and a government informant, both of whom personally delivered cocaine and picked up money from Moquete at his residence, Lowe said. Court papers said Moquete was personally responsible for the distribution of more than 1,500 kilos of coke.

Defense attorney **Scott Sigman** said that Moquete had a "low-level role" in the drug-dealing organization, was a "buyer" of cocaine but "not part of its leadership or command and control" and had no prior criminal record. The defense attorney sought the mandatory minimum 10-year sentence, and said Moquete was "merely a conduit" between suppliers in Mexico and Texas and unknown wholesalers and redistributors here.

During the investigation, authorities recovered more than \$3.5 million in cash and 13 kilos of coke. The cocaine was transported from El Paso, Texas to the Northeast and Midwest by truck drivers in secret compartments of their tractor-trailer cabs. They later returned to Texas with drug proceeds stashed in the same secret compartments. In addition to Moquete and Granado, the feds charged six others in the case. Two pleaded guilty before trial, and one was sentenced to an undisclosed term and the other is to be sentenced in June. The remaining four defendants are fugitives.

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