

# Leader of fentanyl trafficking ring that flew 300K pills to Wichita is sentenced

BY AMY RENEE LEIKER  
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An Arizona man has been sentenced to more than 22 years in prison for his role in a drug trafficking ring that brought “large amounts” of illicit fentanyl into Kansas, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Kansas announced Wednesday.

Prosecutors say 35-year-old Rafael Turner was the ringleader of a fentanyl operation that involved at least 45 other people across the U.S., including some in Wichita. He conspired with the group until March 2023 to obtain and distribute the deadly opioid and engaged in a number of conversations and actions to meet that goal, knowing at all times that the fentanyl was illegal, prosecutors say.

He “voluntarily and knowingly” committed the crimes for the “shared mutual benefit” of everyone involved, according to his plea agreement.

Among Turner’s accomplices were two Wichita men — 33-year-old Clifton Ray Weatherspoon and 27-year-old Antonio Dawayne Knight — who flew to Phoenix in February 2023 and bought 300,000 fentanyl pills that they then packed into two suitcases and brought back to Wichita. Prosecutors say the men

checked the luggage under their names at the airport before getting on the plane.

But they didn’t make it far after their arrival.

Law enforcement seized one of the suitcases before it reached baggage claim and got the other when they arrested Weatherspoon and Knight. Each hid approximately 150,000 fentanyl pills stuffed into more than a dozen bags.

Weatherspoon and Knight were each convicted of one count of possession of fentanyl with intent to distribute. Weatherspoon received a 25-year federal prison sentence, a news release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office says.

Knight got half that time, 12 1/2 years.

Turner, who used to live in Wichita, pleaded guilty in March to one count of conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance. He was sentenced on Dec. 4 to 272 months in federal prison, court records show.

“Over the past few years, the federal government has partnered with state and local governments as well as community groups to curtail the fentanyl crisis. The prosecution of this large drug conspiracy was part of that work,” U.S. Attorney Ryan A. Kriegshauser said in the news release.

# Man given maximum sentence for assaulting ICE officer in Wichita

BY ALLISON CAMPBELL  
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A 23-year-old man was given the maximum sentence — 20 years in prison — after he “intentionally assaulted and strangled” an on-duty Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) deportation officer in Wichita, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Kansas.

“Violence against law enforcement is completely unacceptable and will be dealt with very seriously,” U.S. Attorney Ryan Kriegshauser said in the release.

According to court documents Diego Barron-Esquivel, who was described as a Mexican national in the release, “did intentionally and forcibly assault, resist, oppose, impede, intimidate and interfere with” an ICE agent during an altercation on Feb. 28. As a result, the officer was injured, the press release read.

Barron-Esquivel was arrested on March 21 and pleaded guilty in September to forcibly assaulting a

federal officer. Court documents show that he asked for leniency.

“... I am prepared to accept any punishment permitted by law which the Court sees fit to impose. However, I respectfully request the Court to consider, in mitigation of punishment, that I have voluntarily entered a plea of Guilty,” his guilty plea petition read.

On Dec. 4, a judge sentenced Barron-Esquivel to the maximum penalty: 20 years in prison followed by three years of supervised release.

Court documents suggest that after Barron-Esquivel completes his sentence, he will be “released to the custody of a duly authorized immigration official for removal proceedings in accordance with the immigration laws.”

“And if removed from this country he shall remain outside the United States unless legally authorized to re-enter. Upon which the defendant must report to the nearest probation office within 72 hours after re-entry,” court records read.

According to Barron-Esquivel’s guilty plea petition, he indicated that he understood that conviction of a criminal offense may result in deportation from the United States, “exclusion from admission to the United States, and/or denial of naturalization.”



ADAM ALKASASY Courtesy

A former office space at second and Rock Island will open this weekend as a night club called Lvl 1.

# Onetime Old Town office space to open this weekend as nightclub with Miami vibe

BY DENISE NEIL  
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In its previous life, suite 104 at 300 N. Mead has been home to a construction company office and an advertising agency.

But this weekend, it becomes a luxury nightclub where frozen daiquiris will flow.

Adam Alkasasy and Raed Mansour, also the owners of Fever Night Life at 116 N. Mead, said they’ll open Lvl 1 (pronounced Level One) Nightclub & Lounge Friday. They’re considering Friday their

soft opening — though anyone can attend — and Saturday their grand opening.

The vibe at Lvl 1 will be different from Fever, the owners say. The new club will play only Top 40 and Electronic Dance Music, and it’ll have the feel of a Miami or Houston nightclub.

“It’s very luxury inside,” Alkasasy said.

The owners have transformed the former office space by adding a bar, high-top tables fitted with black chairs, group seating with sofas and coffee tables, and a DJ booth. The

dark club is filled with neon light fixtures, and there’s a dance floor in the center of the room.

“Everybody who has come into the building so far says, ‘Wow,’” Mansour said.

The club will charge a cover to enter only after 10 p.m. on crowded Saturday nights, the owners said. The cover charge will run from \$5 to \$10, depending on the night.

Lvl 1 won’t serve food but will offer a long list of frozen daiquiris and wines by the bottle. The club will also feature table service.

Alkasasy and Mansour

have owned several other businesses in Old Town and other parts of Wichita over the years, including revivals of Town & Country on West Kellogg, The Chalet and Heroes. They also ran an Old Town club called 6 Degrees and a club/restaurant called Clouds. All have since closed.

They wanted the office building space for Lvl 1 because of its location in Old Town. It’s on the backside of the building that holds Old Town Square’s Old Chicago restaurant, and although its official address is on Mead, the new club sits on the northwest corner of Second and Rock Island, catty corner from Pumphouse.

“It’s on a very good corner,” Alkasasy said. “I don’t think it should have been an office in the first place, to be honest. It’s very visible and in the middle of the scene. This is where a nightclub or a lounge or a bar needs to be.”

The club will be open from 6 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. daily.

## ANOTHER OLD TOWN CLUB UPDATE

Just before Thanksgiving, another new nightclub opened in Old Town: Sin City Live, which took over an old hair salon building at 130 N. Washington.

At the time, owner Abel Rodriguez said he didn’t plan to close his other Old Town nightclub, Cabron y Vagos, which had operated at 301 N. Washington since 2022.

But he must have had a change of heart. The Cabron y Vagos Facebook page shared an update a few weeks later saying the club would close. The sign has since been removed from the building.

Rodriguez did not return messages about the closing.



COURTESY Chipotle

Andover’s first Chipotle restaurant is now open.

# Two Wichita suburbs just added 3 big-name chain restaurants. One opens this week

BY DENISE NEIL  
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When restaurant chains open in the Wichita market, their next step is often to eye the nearby suburbs of Andover to the east and Derby to the west.

A couple of well-known chains have expanded into those near-Wichita towns over the past couple of months, and another celebrated its opening day this week.

Here are the details:

**CHIPOTLE, ANDOVER**  
Tuesday, Dec. 9 was

opening day for Andover’s first Chipotle restaurant, which sits at 520 E. Cloud in Andover. (That’s near the Dillons at Kellogg and Andover Road.) The restaurant will feature a “Chipotlane” pickup window and will be open daily from 10:45 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The new Chipotle is also still hiring employees. Those interested should visit [chipotle.com/careers](https://chipotle.com/careers).

**CULVER’S, DERBY**  
Nick Campe opened the area’s first Culver’s at 3210 N. Maize Road in Wichita in July 2024. A different franchisee — Ryan Vaughn — is responsible for the area’s

second Culver’s, which opened on Dec. 1 at 2925 S. Rock Road in Derby.

This is the first Culver’s franchise for Vaughn, who started with the chain as a 19 year old and worked his way up. Culver’s, based in Wisconsin, is known for its butter burgers and frozen custard

Derby’s Culvers is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.

## FREDDY’S, ANDOVER

Back in October, Andover also got its first Freddy’s Frozen Custard & Steakburgers restaurant at 646 E. Cloud. Opening day was Oct. 24.

The Andover restaurant is the 10th Freddy’s to open in the Wichita area. The count includes the Freddy’s concession stand at Equity Bank Park in Wichita and the restaurant in Derby.

The new Freddy’s has 2,050 square feet, seating inside for 40, a patio and a drive-through. Its hours are 10:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 10:30 am. to 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.

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