



Press Release

Lake County Sheriff's Office
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Sheriff

PRESS RELEASE **March 24, 2015**

Last week the Lake County Sheriff's Office Heroin Task Force, in cooperation with a number of local and State law enforcement agencies, executed search warrants across Lake County at various Retail stores and Cash for Gold establishments as the result of a lengthy investigation. Over \$150,000 in U.S. currency was seized in the process, and charges are being reviewed by the Prosecutor for multiple counts of receiving stolen property, money laundering, and engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity.

In the Fall of 2014 the Lake County Commissioners, along with the Lake County Sheriff's Office, created the *Heroin Task Force* to criminally investigate and bring to justice not only the individuals involved in purchasing and distributing heroin, but to equally begin to cut off the funding sources used in the heroin trade. One such funding source is the sale of personal property stolen during burglaries from homes and businesses. Such sales are then used to finance the purchase of heroin. The Sheriff's Office immediately began working with local law enforcement, the Lake County Prosecutor's Office, the Lake County Narcotics' Agency, as well as State agencies in a co-operative effort to pull resources at every level together to combat the sale of heroin here in our County.

In January 2014 business owner's in Lake County received personal visits and a detailed letter from the *Lake County Heroin Task Force* explaining the heroin epidemic and its effect on the citizens of Lake County. The Task Force then requested the assistance and cooperation of area businesses to report the attempted sale of suspicious or reported stolen property. They further made clear that compliance checks would be done on a routine basis to insure compliance, and warned that criminal prosecution would result for persons and businesses who were found to be engaged in such illegal activities.

It is important to note that the majority of business owners in Lake County were extremely co-operative in this effort and were found to be complying with the requirements of the law. Most noted their desire to end the trafficking of

drugs throughout their community, and freely worked with law enforcement in its efforts.

However, based on thorough investigative efforts a number of retail stores had search warrants executed on their establishments on March 5, 2015. Based on numerous sales of stolen merchandise the Lake County Sheriff's Heroin Task Force, Lake County Narcotics Agency, Painesville City Police Department, Wickliffe Police Department and the State of Ohio Investigative Unit searched the Dairy Mart at 31 Fern Drive in Painesville, Wickliffe Food Mart at 28926 Euclid Avenue in Wickliffe, and the Spinners Discount Tobacco and Beverage at 29726 Euclid Avenue in Wickliffe. Well over \$100,000 in U.S. currency was seized, and the owners of these establishments are being charged with receiving stolen property at these locations. Further they will be facing administrative charges from the Ohio Investigative Unit for licensing violations

In these investigations it was found that heroin addicts and others would steal items from the big box stores and take the items to these small retail stores to sell. The cash from the sale of these items would then be used by the drug users to purchase more heroin or other narcotics in the support of the addictions. In a major way their thefts were impacting not only the business owners in our community, but indirectly our citizen consumers who pay an increased cost for items purchased as the result of such theft.

Greg A. Croft, the agent-in-charge of the Ohio Investigative Unit, stated this following the execution of the search warrants. *"These investigations should serve as a warning to all business owners who buy and re-sell stolen merchandise. Through the purchase of these stolen items, business owners are directly contributing to the narcotics problems our communities are facing every day and it cannot be tolerated."*

On March 20, 2015 the Lake County Sheriff's Office Heroin Task Force and the Lake County Narcotics Agency co-operated in executing search warrants at the Ohio Gold and Coins at 259 Richmond Street in Painesville, and the Lake County Sheriff's Office Heroin Task Force, the Lake County Narcotics Agency, and the Willoughby Police Department executed a search warrant at the Gold N Merchant at 4829 Robinhood Drive in Willoughby. Over \$8,000 in U. S. currency was seized from these locations, and the cases will be submitted to the Lake County Prosecutor's Office for review of appropriate charges, which may include receiving stolen property, money laundering, and engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity. These businesses were found to be receiving stolen gold, silver and coins for pennies on the dollar without obtaining the identity of the seller as required by law, and then reselling the items to make a profit from the sale of stolen merchandise. The investigation is currently on-going.

It is critical to note that the Lake County Sheriff's Office Heroin Task Force is making major in-roads with the co-operation of the various Lake County chiefs

of Police and State agencies to attack the funding sources for the purchase and sale of heroin and other narcotics across Lake County. These efforts will continue through subsequent compliance checks, and as new funding sources are uncovered by this investigative effort.

The Sheriff's Office Heroin Task Force was formed because of the illegal activity taking place through heroin trafficking in Lake County. We want to make clear that such illegal activity, and failure to comply with the law, will not be tolerated in Lake County. Those who choose to violate such law will be actively sought out and prosecuted.

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