



Lake County Commissioners & Lake County Sheriff's Office



PRESS RELEASE Heroin Task Force

Today, the Lake County Commissioners are announcing the creation of the *Heroin Task Force* under the Lake County Sheriff's Office to address the growing rate of crime related to heroin throughout Lake County.

The consequences of opiate use across the country, and here in Lake County, are alarming. In particular, the heroin of the 1970's has returned to every community across the nation with a vengeance. However, professionals say that today's heroin is much more potent than the product circulated four decades ago, and with its higher degree of purity, people get hooked much faster. Heroin supplanted cocaine in 2011 as the country's deadliest drug, and its death toll continues to soar. In the State of Ohio, 680 people died of heroin overdoses in 2012. In just the past few weeks, two young men died from heroin overdoses.

As the cost of heroin addiction exceeds the addict's funding sources, often due to job loss from the addiction, users steal from their own families and friends to pay for the next fix. Often they steal jewelry and other valuables such as metals or coins which they can take to cash for gold establishments. They cash in the jewelry for much less

than it's worth, but it provides the cash for their next "fix".

Once users deplete their resources after running through family and friends, they turn to the community. One primary method is to steal merchandise from stores, quickly returning the merchandise to get "gift cards" as reimbursement. They then take the gift cards to what have become legalized fencing operations, or to the growing number of gift card cash pay-back machines, to get needed cash for the next heroin buy. More often than not, heroin users break into homes to steal jewelry, gold and other easily carried items they can cash in at cash for gold outlets. Often they leave larger, higher valued items such as televisions and computers behind in the homes they rob since they present little value in their quest for quick cash to pay for heroin.

Even if you are not a heroin "user", we are all adversely affected by its abuse. Our homes are being robbed. We pay more for our purchases due to the effects of thefts from businesses whose cost of stolen merchandise is passed on to consumers. In addition, costs to taxpayers are rising significantly for the adjudication, incarceration, and supervision of heroin addicts and heroin traffickers in our communities.

It is clear that heroin and other opiates are tearing families apart, killing our loved ones and neighbors, and destroying young lives. Today, many counties, including Lake County, have created Opiate Task Forces. These are groups of organizations and individuals united in their commitment to reduce the tragic consequences that stem from the use of heroin and other opiates. Through public education, collaboration, and the wise use of our available resources, they are making a difference.

However, we believe we need to do more by assisting our local law enforcement efforts to identify and prosecute the criminals involved in the buying and selling of heroin in our county. Reducing the fear of our residents who are constantly victimized by break-ins and thefts from their homes and businesses is equally important and it is our hope that the creation of the Heroin Task Force makes an impact to quell those fears and stem the tide of heroin in our community.

Board of Commissioners President Daniel P. Troy explains “Whether we want to believe it or not, our Lake County community has been adversely impacted by all the facets of this heroin scourge. Too many of our law abiding citizens are unfairly paying the price of other people’s bad choices, and the resultant criminal activity those bad choices are generating is costing them in terms of financial and mental peace of mind. That’s why it’s important that Lake County takes steps now to do whatever we can to protect that law abiding majority of our population.”

It is important to note that area law enforcement agencies are not ignoring the problem, nor have they failed to identify these same approaches. The simple fact is that law enforcement is overwhelmed by the number of cases and the scope of the problem. Each department has been inundated by the effects of users and dealers in their own communities. The resulting robberies, burglaries and thefts that are occurring in their own communities make it difficult to allocate the time or the specifically trained personnel to analyze the larger Lake County picture, connect the dots, and address the core of the flow of heroin.

Lake County needs a designated law enforcement effort to address the heroin and opiate problem, as well as the web of issues arising from other drugs. No community, no school, no church, no family is immune. While it is true we cannot *“police our way out of the drug problem”*, we must make every effort to make Lake County a zero tolerance zone.

This is not an easy task. It will take a collective effort by law enforcement across Lake County, as well as neighboring counties, to interact and share information to identify sellers and users. The problem is very large and will require a centralized team to manage the flow of information, the identification of traffickers and routes of delivery, and the facilitation of interdiction efforts to arrest and adjudicate offenders. Once the unit identifies sellers and/or users, uncovers information concerning burglaries, thefts and robberies in various communities, locates fencing operations, and other information related to criminal activity, it can pass the information onto law enforcement in those jurisdictions involved, and assist, if requested, in bringing those investigations to a successful conclusion and conviction.

This will require specifically assigned officers to this effort. They will need to communicate with local law enforcement agencies here in Lake County and in adjacent counties on a regular basis to share information and identify players. Given the fact that the Sheriff’s Office has county-wide law enforcement jurisdiction, the unit would be able to move about the county with law enforcement authority to collaborate with local, State, and Federal law enforcement officials and coordinate efforts. These efforts will be to identify, investigate, arrest, and help adjudicate individuals involved in heroin trafficking

and opiate use here in the neighborhoods of Lake County. Through partnerships with local law enforcement, our Lake County Narcotics Agency and our Crime Lab, the Ohio BCI, the FBI, the DEA and corrections officials, this unit will be able to coordinate efforts on a number of fronts to:

- Identify, investigate and arrest heroin / opiate traffickers either in Lake County, or in neighboring counties that distribute narcotics here.
- Investigate heroin users to identify not only their narcotic dealers, but to identify and track their crimes in order to resolve the burglaries, robberies, and theft associated with their drug addictions that have negatively impacted neighborhoods throughout the county.
- Work closely with the narcotics agents in collaborative efforts to conduct drug stings of dealers and users in the heroin trade that this new unit has identified through its investigative efforts.
- Investigate and pursue both criminal and civil action against covert fencing operations in order to eliminate the flow of cash which enables heroin users to continue to support their drug addiction.
- Once the unit identifies sellers/users, uncovers information concerning burglaries, thefts and robberies in various communities, locates fencing operations, and other information related to criminal activity, it can pass the information onto law enforcement in those jurisdictions involved, and assist if requested in bringing those investigations to a successful conclusion and conviction.

- Create and sustain a media campaign for citizens to identify and turn in users and traffickers in their neighborhoods to eliminate the influx of narcotics that are destroying lives and families in Lake County.

“The Commissioners feel that it is not so much an act of choice but rather one of necessity to make this investment of an additional appropriation to the Sheriff’s Department to create this new interdiction and enforcement unit. The good citizens of this county have been able to take pride in the quality of life they enjoy here. We must make sure that we take the right steps, make the proper decisions, and send a very strong message that we will not tolerate a continuance of this criminal activity. In coordination with the Sheriff’s office and other law enforcement agencies, we will do whatever is necessary to fight for our county’s citizens and against an undeserved deterioration of that quality of life.” Commissioner Daniel Troy