

PUBLIC URGED TO HELP

County Narc Squad Busts Five On Cocaine, Marijuana Charges

BY ERIC CARLSON

Five men were arrested on drug charges in three operations conducted by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department narcotics squad recently, according to supervising Detective Lt. David Crocker.

As the marijuana cultivation season approaches, the department plans to step up its anti-drug activities and is seeking help from the public in identifying suspected drug activities, the detective said.

Acting on a tip from a confidential source of information, narcotics officers on March 12 raided the home of Steven Edward Gurganus, 26, of Willard Drive in the Mill Creek area, Crocker said.

Detective Gary Shay, the lead investigator in the case, obtained a search warrant and found 123 marijuana seedlings growing in trays in a back bedroom and outside the house, Crocker said. Shay arrested Gurganus on a charge of manufacturing marijuana.

Crocker said the plants were "ready to transplant" and would have been worth an estimated \$196,800 at maturity.

During their search of the house, detectives also seized a 25-horsepower Mercury outboard motor, several power tools and other items believed to have been stolen in area break-ins, Crocker said.

An investigation into the case is continuing, with additional charges

expected. Gurganus has been released on bond.

On March 4, the narcotics squad, with support from the sheriff's department Emergency Response Team, conducted a street interdiction operation at a convenience store and adjacent mobile home park in the Phoenix area, Crocker said.

"We have had constant reports of drug activities in this area in the parking lot, in the mobile home park and along the highway," Crocker said.

About 35 people were in the area when detectives closed in at dusk and searched them for drugs and weapons, said Crocker. Officers confiscated a plastic container containing 25-30 rocks of crack cocaine

and about a half-ounce of marijuana. Three men were arrested on cocaine charges.

Several youths suspected of underage drinking fled the area on foot when police approached, the detective said.

Robert Howard Harvey, 50, of Maco Road, Leland was charged with possession of cocaine and possession of drug paraphernalia, a crack pipe, Crocker said. He has been released on \$3,000 bond.

Homer Henry Duncan Jr., 39, of Wilmington has been charged with cocaine possession, maintaining a vehicle for keeping controlled substances and possession of a crack pipe. He is free on \$7,000 bond.

Claude David Cook, 36, of Castle

Hayne is charged with possession of cocaine and drug paraphernalia. He was released on \$4,000 bond.

Another man was arrested in the Phoenix area Friday night after detectives Doug Todd and Billy Hughes observed apparent drug activity in a car while on patrol at about 11:30 p.m., Crocker said.

Phillip Ray Eldridge, 19, of Hevener Street, Leland, was arrested on a charge of felonious cocaine possession. He was released on \$2,000 bond. An investigation into the incident is continuing and another arrest is anticipated, Crocker said.

"They did an excellent job of identifying the drug activity, interacting with the suspects and making the arrest," Crocker said.

He urged anyone with information about possible illegal drug activities in the north end of the county to contact Detective Shay. Reports of marijuana cultivation should be directed to Detective Todd.

Rewards are offered for informa-

tion leading to drug arrests or indictments anywhere in the county, Crocker said. All calls will be kept confidential and court testimony is not required. Narcotics officers can be reached directly by calling (910) 253-4797.

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Sinking Off Inlet A Hoax

The U.S. Coast Guard and a U.S. Marine Corps helicopter responded to a report of a sinking vessel off Lockwood Folly Inlet Wednesday, only to discover that the call was an apparent hoax.

According to station chief BMCS J.D. Arndt, the Oak Island Coast Guard Station received a radio call at about 4:15 p.m. reporting a vessel sinking approximately 25 miles off shore. The caller stated that a 34-year-old man had fallen overboard with no life jacket.

The station immediately launched its 41-foot patrol boat, while Coast Guard Group Fort Macon issued an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast and dispatched the "Pedro" rescue helicopter from Cherry Point Marine Base, Arndt said.

Both units arrived at the scene and searched the area but were unable to find any sign of a sunken boat or crew. The search was called off at 7:30 p.m.

"Due to the nature, content and the way this distress call was issued, it is believed to have been a hoax," Arndt said. "Irregardless of perceived hoax calls, the Coast Guard will launch resources to investigate all calls of distress.

"Unfortunately, hoax calls take up valuable time and resources, which could be directed elsewhere, to somebody having a real emergency," the chief said.

No other Coast Guard activities were reported last week.

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