

48 Indicted On Drug Counts; More Charges Anticipated

BY RAHN ADAMS

Ten months after the state's first special investigative grand jury charged 32 individuals with cocaine trafficking in Brunswick County, 48 more—including a former Ocean Isle Beach town official—were indicted Monday on cocaine and marijuana charges in a continuation of what investigators have dubbed "Operation White Tide."

Among those indicted Monday was DeCarol Williamson, 37, of Route 2, Ocean Isle Beach. Williamson, a local businessman and the son of Ocean Isle Beach developer Odell Williamson, was appointed to the Ocean Isle Beach Board of Commissioners last July, but lost his bid for election to the seat last November. He was indicted Monday on two cocaine trafficking charges stemming from alleged drug offenses in 1984, according to District Attorney Mike Easley.

At a press conference Monday in Bolivia, Easley said the current 270 indictments resulted from a six-month investigation by the state's second investigative grand jury, which has not been dissolved. The special grand jury that returned indictments last June was disbanded, he noted.

"This grand jury is still in session and can continue to investigate," Easley said Monday, indicating that additional indictments are expected to be handed down during the May 16 session of Brunswick County Superior Court.

As of Monday, the grand jury had heard about 36 hours of testimony from 20 witnesses. Monday's indictments involve offenses that allegedly occurred from 1983 until the present, Easley said.

More Charges Expected

A chart that was used by the district attorney to outline the on-going investigation showed that at least 40 more unidentified suspects face possible indictment.

The chart indicated that at least 15 of that number are allegedly linked to illegal drug activity at Shallotte's Resort Plaza shopping center, which was seized by federal authorities last September after its owner, Alvin Bryan Willis III, was indicted on cocaine trafficking charges by the first special grand jury.

Last November, Willis pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to traffic in more than 400 grams of cocaine, as part of a plea arrangement. He was sentenced to 35 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine last December.

Easley emphasized that the investigation is expected to result in indictments in four other southeastern states besides North Carolina.

"There is a large number in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and Florida that are under investigation now by local authorities, but mostly by federal investigative grand juries," he said. "We expect them to be forthcoming with indictments at some time."

'White Tide' Outlined

During the press conference, Easley estimated that the offenses alleged in this week's indictments involved almost 350 pounds of marijuana and cocaine, with marijuana making up most of the total weight. The drugs were worth a total of \$2.5 million, with cocaine accounting for most of that figure. One ounce of cocaine is worth \$1,600 to \$2,000 on the street, he noted.

"To give you an idea of the scheme," Easley said, "a smaller number . . . of Brunswick County residents went to Florida and other states—but mainly Florida—and picked up kilos (2.2 pounds)—sometimes multi-kilos—and brought them to Brunswick County where they were distributed."

"Now, on occasion, they went through Brunswick County to other counties in the state and other states," he added. "But generally once they were brought into

Brunswick County, they were distributed in ounce forms."

Easley said investigators believe the majority of the drugs were transported by car.

"That's the problem with cocaine—you get nicked and dimed to death in the trunk of a car," he commented, then later added, "It was a lot easier back when we had shrimp boats and U-Haul trucks to trace them."

Past Activities Noted

According to Easley, the 48 individuals indicted Monday are not believed to be part of a "ring," although many of them may know each other.

"A lot of it is the same old cartel we had with the marijuana smuggling," he said. "A lot of these conspiracies were going on, and you don't know who was doing what in Brunswick County, but we know what they're doing in Florida and other states."

"So though they may know each other and deal with each other, they don't know what each other is doing in other states," he added. "Each one of these rings—or conspiracies—in and of itself is not isolated . . . There is no isolated conspiracy, which concerns us."

SBI Deputy Director Charles Dunn and Brunswick County Sheriff John C. Davis also participated in Monday's press conference to comment on the special grand jury's importance in apprehending suspected drug traffickers.

"When you look and see some of the interconnections of the drug trafficking in this state with other states in the Southeast . . . you'll see that this is not something that just comes together," Dunn said. "It's something that somebody plans and puts together and has developed a very elaborate system of distribution."

"It's really a cancer on our society," Dunn added, "and certainly we've made a little surgical effort to get some of it out with this operation, but the problem will not go away today."

Noting that the special grand jury has received mixed reviews from lawmen across the state, Davis expressed his support of the concept.

"Some of the sheriffs were reluctant about this state investigative grand jury," Davis said. "I've always supported it. I support it now. I think we need it."

"Some of them seemed to think this was going to cause a witch hunt," Davis added, "and if this has been a witch hunt in Brunswick County, I say let's keep on with it and get the witches."

Charges Described

Williamson, who is self-employed with DeCarol Williamson Enterprises, was indicted on charges including conspiracy to traffic in more than 400 grams of cocaine and possession of more than 400 grams of cocaine, according to the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office.

In addition to the four months Williamson served on the Ocean Isle Beach town board last year, he is a former Brunswick County representative on the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority—a post he resigned earlier this year. He also has served as associate pastor of Brunswick Christian Center in Thomasboro and as chairman of both the Brunswick County Democratic Men's Club and the Brunswick County Independent Insurance Agents organization.

"(Williamson) had a group of people with whom he dealt directly . . . and by indictment you'll notice that occurred in 1984, the two counts against Mr. Williamson," Easley told reporters.

Following the press conference, the district attorney added that Williamson "got in it and out of it on his own . . . He wasn't busted, he just quit."

Special Assistant District Attorney Bill Wolak, who will prosecute the drug trafficking cases, said Williamson allegedly was involved in illegal drug activity for

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DISTRICT ATTORNEY MIKE EASLEY (standing) announces that Brunswick County's second investigative grand jury returned 270 indictments against 48 suspected drug traffickers Monday afternoon in

Bolivia. Also pictured are (from left) Brunswick County Sheriff John C. Davis and SBI Deputy Director Charles Dunn.

Ocean Isle Hopes To Fill Chief Of Police Vacancy Quickly

BY DOUG RUTTER

The Town of Ocean Isle Beach will advertise immediately for a new chief of police following last week's resignation of William Ozment.

Ozment, who has served as police chief for about 10 months, announced last Friday that he will vacate the post April 30. In his letter of resignation, he said he believes "it is in the best interest of me and my family to return to Greensboro."

Ozment will return to work as a patrol officer in his hometown of Greensboro starting May 2.

He said last week the primary factor in his decision to leave the department was the recent illness of his mother-in-law. She needs family support, he said.

"It was one of the hardest decisions I've ever had to make in my life," said Ozment.

Mayor Betty Williamson said Saturday the town will advertise and hire a new police chief as soon as possible.

"I think the town's been very fortunate to have the caliber of person that Chief Ozment is," she added. "We're sorry to see him leave, but we understand his decision."

The mayor also said that Ozment had not mentioned to her that he was considering leaving the area.

Despite the resignations of two town police officers within the past month, Ozment said his decision to leave was not job-related. He said the other vacancies in the department are just "coincidental."

According to Ozment, Jerry Wilson resigned March 30 to go into business for himself and Bill Lewis resigned about one week later for personal reasons. The town has advertised to fill those positions.

Ozment started working as chief of police and superintendent of streets and sanitation at Ocean Isle Beach June 16.

He was hired following the resignation of former police chief Jerry Gurganus, who left June 1 for "personal reasons" after 14 years with the department.

Prior to coming to Ocean Isle Beach, Ozment had worked 20 years with the Greensboro Police Department.

When he left that department last summer, he said he was given the option to return within one year.

Another factor in his decision to leave, he added, is the fact that his wife, Sandra, will have a better opportunity to find work in a secretarial or administrative position in Greensboro. She had been working locally in the real estate industry.

In his letter, Ozment also said working as chief of police "has been a very rewarding experience for me, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have served the citizens of Ocean Isle Beach."

During an interview last week, Ozment said of the town, "It's just a unique place, kinda special to me. I'm leaving on a very positive note, but also with great sorrow."

He added, "You sort of hate to walk away from this because it is so enjoyable. But I know I'm better off for having lived and worked here."

Ozment said he and his wife will keep their home at Ocean Isle and plan to make frequent visits to the area.

"In spite of the job change," he joked, "you're still gonna have to put up with me."

'White Tide' Drug Defendants Are Residents Of Three States

In "Operation White Tide," a special Brunswick County investigative grand jury indicted 48 individuals from North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida Monday on a total 270 drug trafficking counts.

Defendants include 28 from Brunswick County, seven from elsewhere in North Carolina, two from South Carolina and 11 from Florida. Charges involve both cocaine and marijuana trafficking.

According to Special Assistant District Attorney Bill Wolak, the penalty for a conviction on each trafficking count involving between 28 grams and 200 grams of cocaine ranges from seven years to 15 years in prison, with a \$50,000 fine; 200 grams to 400 grams of cocaine, 14 years to 20 years, \$100,000 fine; more than 400 grams of cocaine, 35 years to 40 years, \$250,000 fine.

Wolak said the penalty for a conviction on each marijuana trafficking count involving 50 pounds to 100 pounds range from five years to 10 years in prison, with a \$5,000 fine; 100 pounds to 2,000 pounds, seven years to 15 years, \$25,000 fine.

However, the district attorney noted that both the prison term and fine can be reduced if a trial judge determines that the individual defendant provided "substantial assistance" to the state in the investigation.

Defendants in "Operation White Tide" include:

•John Dudley Bryant, 45, Route 1, Leland; possession of cocaine, more than 28 grams.

•Jeffery L. Caison, 29, Barefoot Bay, Supply; possession of cocaine, conspiracy to traffic in cocaine,

more than 28 grams, Dec. 15, 1986.

•Ricky Dale Caison, 27, Route 1, Supply; five counts conspiracy to traffic in cocaine, five counts possession of cocaine, more than 28 grams, June 15, 1986, to Dec. 15, 1986.

•Freddie Gerald Carroll, 32, Keystone Heights, Fla.; conspiracy to traffic in cocaine, possession of cocaine, transporting cocaine, more than 400 grams, Dec. 11, 1983.

•Jerry Delane Carter, 31, Shallotte; conspiracy to traffic in cocaine, possession of cocaine, more than 400 grams, Jan. 15, 1984.

•Irvin Lane Carter, 37, Hawthorne, Fla.; two counts conspiracy to traffic in cocaine, more than 400 grams, Dec. 11, 1983, and Jan. 15, 1984.

•Robert Darrell Carter, 24, Starke, Fla.; delivery of cocaine, transporting cocaine, possession of cocaine, more than 400 grams, Dec. 19, 1987.

•Robert Dale Clemmons, 34, Shallotte; conspiracy to traffic in cocaine, possession of cocaine, transporting cocaine, more than 28 grams, Jan. 9, 1985.

•Sandra Lynn Coker, Myrtle Beach, S.C.; conspiracy to traffic in cocaine, more than 400 grams, Dec. 11, 1983.

•Christopher Matthew Corbett, 20, Route 1, Supply; conspiracy to traffic in marijuana, possession of marijuana, transporting marijuana, more than 100 pounds, March 1, 1986; transporting cocaine, five counts conspiracy to traffic in cocaine, five counts

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Roberts Sentenced In Cocaine Case

BY RAHN ADAMS

A local realtor received an active prison sentence this week in Brunswick County Superior Court, eight months after he pleaded guilty to cocaine trafficking charges.

Judge Giles Clark sentenced Virgil Roberts, 51, of Holden Beach, to a 3½-year prison term on Monday, according to the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office.

The defendant was given credit for 57 days that he spent undergoing pre-sentencing evaluation at the N.C. Department of Corrections facility in Troy.

Roberts, owner of Virgil Roberts Realty at Holden Beach, was one of 37 individuals indicted last June and July in Brunswick County on cocaine trafficking charges as a result of work done by the state's first investigative grand jury.

On Aug. 10, 1987, he pleaded guilty as charged to possession of more than 400 grams of cocaine, two counts of conspiracy to traffic in more than 400 grams of cocaine, five counts of conspiracy to traffic in more than 28 grams of cocaine and four counts of

trafficking by possession of more than 28 grams of cocaine.

According to court records, Roberts faced a maximum sentence of 255 years in prison and a mandatory minimum sentence of 168 years.

However, after hearing testimony Monday morning, Clark ruled that Roberts had provided "substantial assistance in the identification, arrest and conviction of co-defendants in the offenses for which he is charged," court documents stated. A finding of "substantial assistance" allows a judge to hand down a lesser sentence than is required by the state's drug trafficking laws.

Special Assistant District Attorney Bill Wolak said Monday that only three of the original 37 drug defendants remain to be tried. Some 34 defendants entered guilty pleas. Of that number, all but 10 had been sentenced as of Tuesday, Wolak said.

According to Wolak, defendants yet to be tried include Dale Varnum of Supply, who was scheduled to appear in Brunswick County Superior Court today (Thursday). Fotios

Kamtsiklis of Greenville and fugitive Francisco Navarro of Fort Myers, Fla.

SBI Agent Corey Duber said Monday that Navarro was arrested last month in Mexico and is awaiting extradition to the United States. After tracking the drug suspect for almost a year, Duber used confidential informants to "lure" Navarro to Juarez, Mexico, where he was taken into custody on a fugitive warrant by Mexican police.

However, Wolak said the U.S. Department of State is having difficulty returning Navarro here to be prosecuted.

"For some reason, the Mexican authorities have refused to honor the extradition request by the United States," Wolak said Monday. "Navarro's going to have to be tried, and I don't know what it's going to take to get him back here."

Wolak noted that one other fugitive—Alan Dale Brooks of Shallotte—remains at large. Brooks fled after pleading guilty to drug charges in Brunswick County, Wolak said.