

# Buying drugs to catch dealers in Richland County

Heroin was on the METRICH Enforcement Unit's shopping list recently.

"We've got somebody (informant) coming in shortly," Detective Steve Blust said. "Heroin's the biggest thing right now, that and pills. Drug dealers are just like any other business; they go where the money's at."

The plan was for the informant to make a buy to help build a case against the dealer.

"We normally don't do buy-busts because it burns our CIs (confidential informants)," Sgt. Joe Petrycki said.

Petrycki, who oversees the day-to-day operations at METRICH, said informants aren't hard to find. Most are looking to work off their charges or to receive leniency when they are sentenced. It's not unusual for federal officials to pay informants \$50,000 or \$60,000, depending on the case, Petrycki said. Such money is not available locally.

Detectives briefed the informant on what was to take place.

"The informant has set up a transaction for us today," Mansfield police Chief and former METRICH Commander Ken Coontz said. "We're going to buy a significant amount of heroin from (the dealer). At some point, we'll expand the investigation."

Coontz said informants always are patted down before and after a buy to protect the integrity of the investigation.

"We pride ourselves on procedure," he said.

Coontz said safety for both the informant and the officers involved comes first, before the actual drug buy. The chief said there have been some close calls in the past.

"We preach walking away from a drug buy if it gets too risky," Coontz said. "You can always get more drugs."

The buy went off as planned. Detectives returned to the office to do the requisite paperwork.

Next on the agenda was a "knock-and-talk" at a Madison Township residence.

"You go to the house, knock on the door and see who's living there, see if they'll let us verify the complaint," Blust said.

In the case at hand, detectives received a complaint on the 10-county regional drug task force's website, METRICH.com. The complaint said there was a lot of traffic at the house, which could indicate drug activity, and a child lived there.

A woman met Blust and fellow Detectives Aaron Bushey and Mandi Rodriguez at the door. A few minutes later, a little blond boy came outside and showed Detective Jake Tidaback his aluminum bat, then engaged in an impromptu game of catch with Tidaback and Detective Perry Wheeler.

Blust said detectives recovered marijuana and some unidentified pills.

"More or less, it was successful," he said. "We're not going to arrest her tonight. We'll see what she's willing to do to help herself."

Detectives next planned to conduct several more knock-and-talks at the North Ford Road trailer park, but they were sidetracked when Wheeler got a call from another agency.

He pulled off at Westbrook Country Club. Coontz asked Detective Steve Schivinski, who was riding with Wheeler, what was happening.

"We figured we'd stop here for dinner, play a round of golf," Schivinski joked.

The call was much more serious. A kilo of heroin was possibly headed to Mansfield on Interstate 71, and the other agency asked METRICH to provide surveillance.

"If it's coming into Mansfield, we're going to try to figure out where it's going," Coontz said.

With detectives posted at several locations, the vehicle passed through Richland County without getting off at any of the exits.

"It's gone," Wheeler said. "They think it's going to Columbus."

Wheeler seemed a bit frustrated.

"This type of thing happens every day," he said. "We'll be doing something and then, bam!"

The detectives resigned themselves to head back to headquarters to prepare paperwork from the Madison Township stop.

All in a day's work for METRICH.

"It's not glamorous," Coontz said. "A lot of it's boring."

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