

## Man gets 3 years in prison for transporting pot in plane

By HEATHER CHAPIN-FOWLER

**NORWALK** — The 48-year-old New Mexico man who piloted a plane to the Huron County area that jettisoned several pounds of marijuana near Willard was sentenced to three years in prison yesterday.

Ryan Carter Thomas, of Albuquerque, N.M., also forfeited an approximate \$2,000 check to the Huron County authorities instead of paying a fine for the possession of marijuana conviction, according to Huron County Common Pleas Court records.

Thomas and his passenger, Greg Baca, were arrested in June after federal authorities following in another plane saw the bag of marijuana being tossed out of the aircraft.

Thomas and Baca were taken into custody at the Huron County Airport in Norwalk Township while deputies and Willard police officers found the bag that was filled with approximately 20 pounds of marijuana "tightly compressed" in five bricks, according to authorities.

They were on their way to the Cleveland area when the federal officials spotted them, investigators have said.

Thomas also forfeited his 1963 Mooney fixed-wing, single-engine plane as part of the conviction.

The Huron County Sheriff's Office will receive 80 percent of the sale proceeds as well as the forfeited check and the prosecutor's office will receive 20 percent, Prosecutor Russell Leffler said.

The plane's value has been roughly estimated at \$35,000, but Leffler said they won't know its actual worth until it's sold.

Baca was also convicted of possession of marijuana as well as tampering with evidence for pitching the marijuana out of the airplane's window, officials have said. Baca is scheduled to be sentenced Oct. 20.

In addition to the sheriff's office, investigators from the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Border Patrol and Homeland Security offices assisted in the investigation, according to officials.

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