

Operation results in largest drug seizure in county

MOUNT VERNON — A joint law enforcement operation over the weekend has resulted in the largest drug seizure in Knox County's history, according to Sheriff David Barber.

Barber said the Central Ohio Drug Enforcement Task Force teamed up with the Knox County Sheriff's Office following a lengthy investigation of a marijuana distribution operation in Knox County.

Barber said his Tactical Response Unit and detectives and CODE TF members executed two search warrants simultaneously at two Utica area residences at 4:15 a.m. on Saturday. Detectives seized 21 large bales of marijuana weighing nearly 500 pounds, dozens of firearms and a large amount of cash, along with a pickup truck and cargo trailer.

Barber said 52-year-old Jeffrey L. Justice of 1356 Cullison Road, Utica, was arrested on second-degree felony charges of trafficking in marijuana and possession of marijuana. Justice was transported to the Knox County Jail.

Two other men were arrested in connection with the drug operation following a traffic stop on Interstate 70 near the Licking/Franklin County line. The men were identified as 58-year-old Brad Williams of Oceanside, Calif., and 26-year-old Hector Manuel Aviles of Gantee, Calif. Williams and Aviles have each been charged with second-degree felony counts of possession of marijuana and trafficking in marijuana.

"The outstanding cooperation from CODE TF has resulted in the largest drug seizure in this county's history," said Barber, who estimated the street value of the seized marijuana to be approximately three-quarters of a million dollars.

Other agencies assisting in the investigation, arrests and seizures were the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration, Ohio State Highway Patrol and the Knox County Prosecutor's Office.

The Knox County sheriff's and prosecutor's offices are active members of the METRICH Enforcement Unit

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