

METRICH receives \$112,500 grant

Funding to be used for covert operations

METRICH Commander Lt. Keith Porch can't overestimate the importance of funding from the Office of Criminal Justice Services.

"Without the funding, we wouldn't exist," he said. "Their support is what makes METRICH possible. It has allowed us to be in existence for 27 years."

METRICH, a 10-county regional drug task force, received Monday a check for \$112,500 from the Office of Criminal Justice Services, part of the Ohio Department of Public Safety.

Mansfield police Chief Ken Coontz said METRICH receives two grants a year from the Office of Criminal Justice Services, totaling about \$350,000. The chief said Monday's money will go toward covert operations such as drug buys.

"There is not enough funding locally," Coontz said. "Money from OCJS is our backbone. It's what keeps us going."

METRICH covers 550,000 people in the 10-county region.

"Our region is economically depressed," Coontz said.

Coontz emphasized the need for the funding, noting the area has seen two deaths from heroin overdoses since a Jan. 24 drug forum.

Mansfield Mayor Tim Theaker and state Rep. Mark Romanchuk, R-Ontario, were on hand for Monday's check presentation.

Theaker thanked the state officials — John Born, director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and Karlton Moore, executive director of the Office of Criminal Justice Services — for the funding.

"Any money that you give to us, we're more than willing to take that on," the mayor joked.

Like Coontz, Born focused on the heroin problem, which he said can sometimes seem like an insurmountable challenge.

“Heroin is beyond epidemic,” Born said. “It can affect every person.”

Born said he doesn’t see the war on drugs as a win or a loss. He looks at the individual success stories, noting every person who is deterred from drugs gets another chance at life.

Born also complimented METRICH for its success. The drug task force seized 110 percent more heroin in 2013 than it did the previous year.

“METRICH is a statewide model for how it should be done,” Born said.

Moore said grants such as the one presented Monday are an investment in people. He praised METRICH’s professionalism.

“This has been a model task force,” Moore said. “Throughout leadership changes, it has continued to remain a model.”

Coontz pointed to METRICH detectives Steve Blust, Perry Wheeler and Jake Tidaback as the people behind the scenes.

“There’s always someone behind the leadership,” Coontz said

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