

Drug Sweep To Net 45 Charges

Dozens of Lawmen Begin Roundup in Pre-Dawn Arrests in County

A more than 12-month-old undercover operation to put a dent in Texas County's illegal drug trade climaxed Wednesday as dozens of lawmen rounded up suspects.

By 1 p.m. Wednesday, 29 persons had been arrested, brought to a command post at Houston City Hall for fingerprinting before being transferred to the Texas County Jail. Others were being moved to neighboring counties because of a lack of space. The county jail can only house 22 male and two female prisoners.

In all, 37 people face 45 felony charges. Many of the complaints involve multiple times of selling drugs. In all, 90 counts — drug transactions — are involved.

Lawmen said it was the largest investigation in the county ever conducted to control illegal drug activity. It surpasses a December 1986 probe that netted 16 arrests.

Officers began picking up suspects at about 5 a.m. Specially trained dogs assisted about 15 state troopers and another 15 county and city officers. A mobile communications trailer was in operation in a parking lot behind Houston City Hall.

Arrests were assigned to teams of officers. In some cases, properties also were being checked. Gator, the county's drug-sniffing canine, also had his nose called into service. Lawmen were set to formally announce the investigation and its results during an afternoon press conference held late Wednesday afternoon.

Here is what was learned by press time:

The drug investigation, undertaken by the Missouri State Highway Patrol with assistance from the Texas County Sheriff's Department, capped a probe that began in February 1990.

Using a network of informants and an undercover agent, illegal drugs were purchased from Texas County residents. Those buys occurred throughout the county.

The effort was financed by the Missouri State Highway Patrol's Division of Drug and Crime Control in Jefferson City that receives federal monies to conduct such operations.

Unknown until yesterday, one charge and conviction has already resulted from the investigation.

Officers said one man pled guilty and was later sentenced.

Dozens of charges will make their way through the court system, predicts Texas County Sheriff John Vandiver.

Texas County Prosecutor Brad Ellsworth, whose office filed the counts, said the bombardment on Wednesday should be a strong warning to other Texas County drug dealers.

Ellsworth earlier this year, upon hiring a part-time assistant prosecuting attorney, said he would make eradication of drugs a top priority. The hiring, he said, would allow him to work on major felony cases, such as drugs.

"Some people didn't heed the warning, and there's people still out there who didn't get caught. This is your message: You cease or desist this activity or you'll be next," Ellsworth warned.

"This type of activity threatens our young people, and it is a concern."

Ellsworth, who said he believes officers have assembled strong cases, noted when he made his vow in January he was unaware that the undercover operation was already under way. Some of the evidence includes tape recorded conversations.

Unlike the 1986 investigation that primarily involved marijuana sales, the majority of the cases involve the sale of methamphetamine, which is sprouting like mushrooms, to become the drug of choice. It also is known as crank, crystal and speed. Abusers can snort, smoke or inject the crystalline, white powder.

Prescription narcotics and marijuana also were sold to the undercover patrolman.

"We think there are some major suppliers involved here," Ellsworth said. Because of safety concerns in some cases, a Missouri State Highway Patrol helicopter was on standby to assist officers on the ground.

So how did so many people get drawn into the operation? Those familiar with the investigation said a network of informants assisted lawmen.

For example, in one case, a man cooperated with authorities after he was involved in a transaction. Lawmen quickly turned the tables on the unidentified man after the suspect surmised he had been caught; instead of risking prosecution himself, he funnelled leads to lawmen of those he knew involved in illegal drug activity.

Others were not as fortunate.
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County Jail Fills; Suspects Transferred

A Texas County drug probe has produced charges against numerous residents.

Here's a list of those who had been arrested by 12:20 p.m. All face charges for selling illegal drugs, lawmen said:

Pamela Sue Hall, 31, Houston; Jerry McColgin, 30, Licking; Carl D. Cantrell, 39, Raymondville; Lesta Boster, 28, Elk Creek; Richard L. Marshall, 25, Licking; Virginia Brightman, 62, Raymondville; and Roger Burgess, 24, Licking.

Reginald W. Skouby, 35, Houston; Leta Christensen, 27, Houston; Kenneth Hall, 32, Bucyrus; Bruce Wehmeyer, 29, Houston; Ron Hern, 29, Cabool; Connie Roberts, 26, Houston; Sheila Dean, 29, Houston.

Richard Hassell, 41, Licking; Wayne Fisher, 48, Licking; Lyndon Dodson, 28, Houston; Denise Thayer, 30, Licking; Donald Pritchett, 33, Raymondville;

UPDATE
By a 1 p.m. presstime, lawmen had arrested 29 persons and brought them to a command post at Houston City Hall. Bond in the cases, which was set by Judge John Beeler, was \$2,500 to \$5,000 per count. Because of a lack of space at the Texas County Jail, some suspects were being transferred to other counties.

Raymondville; Darrell Wollard, 27, Cabool; and Steven K. Dorothy, 25, Houston.
Melvin L. Mitchell, 45, Houston;

Jerry Keller, 32, Bucyrus; Dawn White, 29, Houston; Floyd "Maurice" Amburn, 26, Houston; and Charlotte S. Crisp, 37, Raymondville.

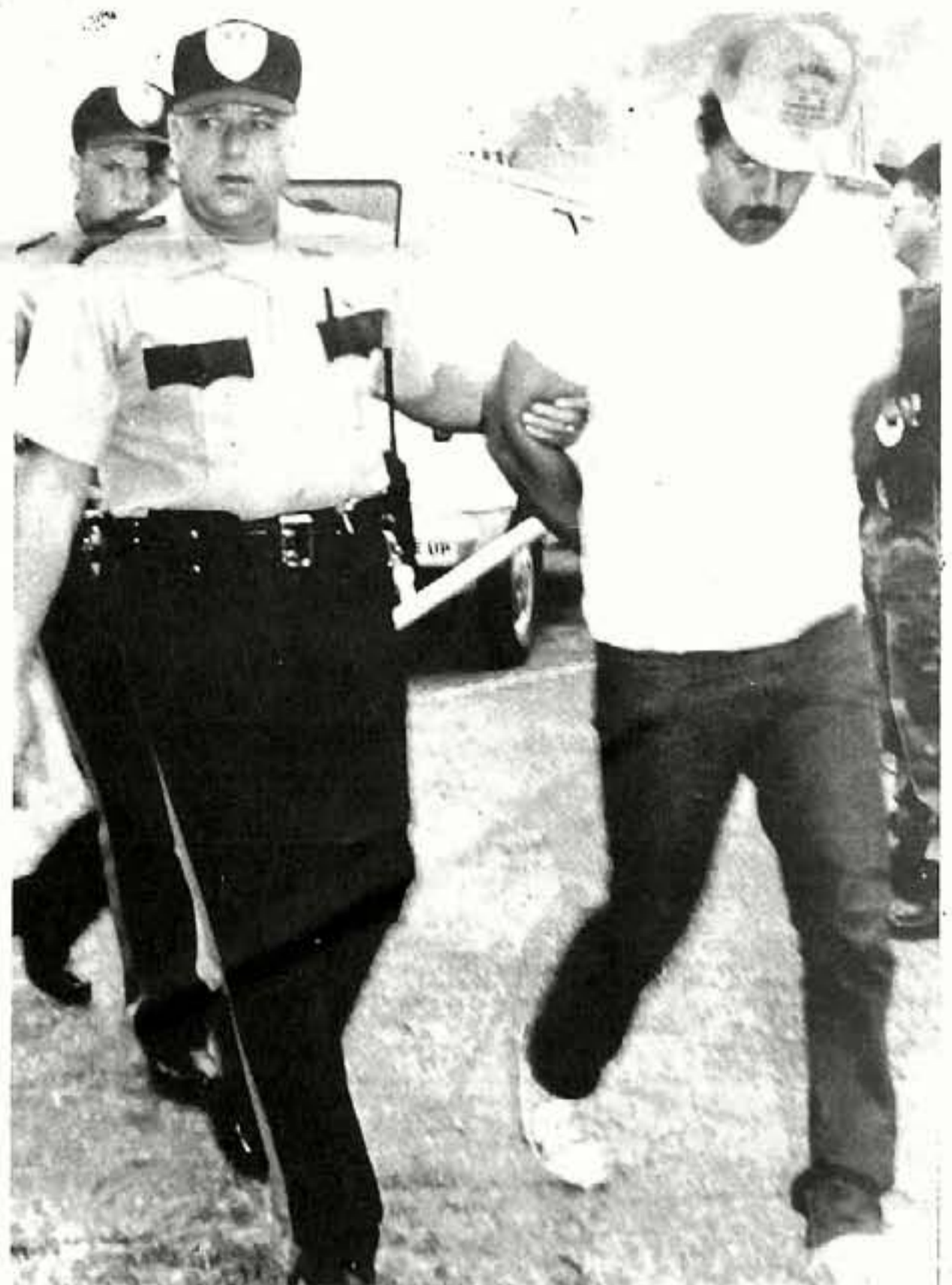
Angelia Fronterhouse, 20, Bucyrus, faces only a bad check charge.

Two persons were arrested but had yet to be charged.

Uniforms Thick For Drug Bust

Houston probably had the highest per capita law enforcement coverage Wednesday of any city in Missouri.

Uniformed officers representing this county, adjacent counties, Houston and neighboring Texas County towns and the Highway Patrol were here in such numbers
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Houston Police Chief Carlross "Joe" Kirkman, left, leads Bruce A. Wehmeyer of Houston into a command post early Wednesday. The Wehmeyer arrest was one of the first assignments given to officers in a massive sweep Wednesday that began at 5 a.m.

Prosecutor Looks To Seize Property

Texas County Prosecutor Brad Ellsworth will move to seize property from some suspects in the big roundup Wednesday.

Petitions were expected to be filed in Texas County Circuit Court that if successful, would sell property used in illegal activity.

Ellsworth said he would seek forfeiture of at least three automobiles and two homes through paperwork filed with the court.

Missouri laws authorize police to seize property from criminal suspects.

The provisions most often used

were passed in 1939 and in 1957 as part of the state's drug laws.

Five years ago, a second law — the Criminal Activity Forfeiture Act, known as CAFA — prompted a stepped-up effort among authorities in the state to begin seizing cash, cars and other property.

Officers Move Out across County

Methamphetamine Sales Involved



Wednesday's arrests stemmed from primarily the sale of methamphetamine in the county. Here, the illegal drug.

Nicknamed "meth," "crank" and "speed," methamphetamine is as addictive as cocaine but more available. Locally, lawman said a habit can cost thousands of dollars. The drug is expensive.

Dozens of law enforcement officers from several agencies gathered early Wednesday to launch one of the largest drug investigations ever conducted here.

While Houston slept, officers got detailed information about their assignments at a briefing that began about 4 a.m. in the Houston City Council chambers.

Officers received data on each of 37 persons charged.

By 5 a.m. teams of officers — from Wright, Texas and Phelps counties, Houston, Cabool, troops of the Missouri State Highway Patrol and Missouri Conservation Department — whisked away in cars to complete their assignments throughout fog-covered Texas County. Two hours later, 14 of the suspects had been brought in.

Those charged were arrested at homes, apartments and places of employment. Vehicles were seized and towed to Houston.

"It is a great way to wake up in the morning," said a dazed Roger Burgess, one of those brought in.

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Sales Tax Revenue Decreases

Revenue from a one-cent sales tax in the City of Houston dipped during the latest monthly reporting period.

Proceeds remain up about 4 percent from the same period a year ago.

The Missouri Department of Revenue reported that monies reported by merchants totaled \$33,961, a decrease of \$4,455 from the same monthly period a year ago. For the year, \$130,347 has been collected. That's an increase of

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Sales Tax Decreases for Month

