

***JACKSON COUNTY
DRUG TASK FORCE***



***2018
ANNUAL REPORT***

JACKSON COUNTY DRUG TASK FORCE HISTORY

In 1986, the Jackson County Missouri Drug Task Force (JCDF) was organized as a multi-jurisdictional investigative initiative in response to an emerging drug problem within the county. Throughout the 1980's, drug trafficking and an active drug culture were a part of daily life throughout Kansas City, Missouri, and much of Jackson County. Illicit drugs, such as crack cocaine, methamphetamine, and PCP, were openly traded on street corners. Drug houses and methamphetamine labs literally sprung up throughout our County overnight. During its initial years, the JCDF was funded through private donations and one grant.

In 1990, Jackson County residents approved a new one-quarter of one-percent anti-drug sales tax which would later become known as the Community Backed Anti-Drug Tax (COMBAT). The tax would support a broad based attack on drug abuse and drug related violent crimes. One of the enforcement initiatives COMBAT would fund was the JCDF.

The tax was renewed for seven-year periods in 1995, 2004, 2009 and 2016. The COMBAT tax provided the JCDF with an adjusted budget of \$2,227,448 in 2018.

The JCDF is a voluntary law enforcement organization that operates under the direction of an Executive Board comprised of representatives from fourteen jurisdictions in eastern Jackson County. Eight of these agencies supply manpower for the Task Force, while a Legal Advisor and Fiscal Officer are maintained on a contractual and part time basis.

- **Blue Springs Police - 3 Investigators**
- **Buckner Police**
- **Grain Valley Police – 1 Investigator**
- **Grandview Police - 1 Sergeant, 2 Investigator**
- **Greenwood Police**
- **Independence Police – 1 Sergeant, 2 Investigators**
- **Jackson County – 1 OIC, 1 Administrative, 1 Property Officer**
- **Jackson County Sheriff – 3 Investigators, 1 Warrant Service Officer**
- **Lake Lotawana Police**
- **Lee's Summit Police - 3 Investigators**
- **Lone Jack Police**
- **Missouri State Highway Patrol**
- **Oak Grove Police - 1 Investigator**
- **Raytown Police**
- **Sugar Creek Police - 1 Investigator**

The JCDF also has two positions on loan from the following:

- **Missouri National Guard – 1 Analyst (Non-Sworn)**
- **Drug Enforcement Administration – 1 Special Agent (Sworn)**

JACKSON COUNTY DRUG TASK FORCE MISSION

The County of Jackson has approximately 604.84 square miles. With a population of 683,191 in the 2014 Census, Jackson County is the second most populous of Missouri's counties, after St. Louis County. The JCDF primarily focuses on the eastern and southern portions of the county, which includes all suburban jurisdictions and unincorporated areas. The purpose of the JCDF is to provide a combined and unified response to the drug and narcotics related violent crime problem as it exists in eastern Jackson County, Missouri.

While JCDF participates with all federal, state and local Kansas City area law enforcement agencies, its primary investigative mission and focus continues toward the outlying areas of the county which are not adequately serviced by other agencies. In 2018, the JCDF participated in an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDEF) with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Department of Homeland Security. These partnerships allowed for the JCDF to be partially reimbursed for narcotics buy money and overtime costs associated with the federal investigations. The JCDF formed two (2) new OCDEF investigations in 2018 and was actively involved four (4) previously formed OCDEF investigations.

In 2011, an agreement was signed with the Missouri National Guard to provide one Intelligence Analyst to assist with long term investigations. This agreement continued in 2018.

A JCDF detective obtained a high level security clearance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation in order to assist in investigations involving large scale Transnational Criminal Drug Organizations. Additionally, the JCDF is coordinating with the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to address the increasing problem of Local gangs, who have set up sophisticated distribution networks in Jackson County, and are obtaining large amounts of illegal drugs from Mexican based Drug Trafficking Organizations.

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES SEIZED/PURCHASED

2018	Marijuana	Methamphetamine	Crack/ Cocaine	MDMA	Heroin	PCP	Pills
Pounds	165.1	136.0	1.2		5.4	14.2	
Ounces	2,676.3	2,204.7	19.2		87.2	230.4	
Grams	74,937.0	61,730.5	536.5	89.0	2,442.4	6,451.2	660.6

VALUE OF CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES SEIZED/PURCHASED

2018	Marijuana	Methamphetamine	Crack/ Cocaine	MDMA	Heroin	PCP	Pills
Value	\$ 1,605,900	\$ 11,790,524	\$ 72,428	\$ 4,450	\$ 691,199	\$ 1,935,360	\$ 49,545

TOTAL VALUE OF ALL CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES SEIZED

Drug values based on adjusted street prices for illegal drugs 2014 National Drug Control Strategy Data

\$16,149,483.33

FIREARMS SEIZED/PURCHASED



Long Guns \$200 / each	Hand Guns \$400 / each
15	57
\$3,000	\$22,800



STATISTICS

	Cases Opened	Cases Closed	Search Warrants	Knock-n-Talks	Presentations	Narcotics Purchased	Money Recovered	Meth Labs Processed	Marijuana Grows Processed
2010	149	67	71	78	6	178	\$140,602	7	8
2011	201	32	42	56	12	127	\$111,134	4	1
2012	124	206	73	66	10	180	\$411,048	1	3
2013	119	173	92	30	21	408	\$275,876	0	3
2014	74	208	48	48	1	158	\$424,762	0	2
2015	127	199	58	82	1	218	\$330,372	0	1
2016	132	301	61	21	4	170	\$136,261	1	0
2017	92	114	50	10	9	140	\$135,475	0	0
2018	80	110	50	6	8	170	\$302,206	0	2

CASE COMPARISON

	Total Cases Presented	Federal Cases	State Cases	Arrests	Warrant Arrests	Detectives Funded	Value of Seized Narcotics
2010	52	5	47	227		14	\$1,054,321
2011	271	186	85	244		14	\$4,871,131
2012	339	250	89	427		13	\$4,116,215
2013	205	128	65	177		11	\$7,568,018
2014	204	106	98	209		11	\$8,894,042
2015	216	122	82	262	225	12	\$6,530,240
2016	290	215	75	292	222	13	\$5,218,156
2017	213	166	47	269	200	11	\$13,461,484
2018	92	65	27	187	94	14	\$16,149,483

PROSECUTION COMPARISON
2010 – 2018
Cases presented for prosecution

Federal							
2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
186	250	128	106	122	215	166	65

State							
2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
85	89	65	98	82	75	47	27

2018 DRUG COMPLAINT REPORT

During 2018, the Jackson County Drug Task Force received a total of 52 Drug Complaints. The following table is a statistical break down of the complaint location by jurisdiction and the sources from which the complaints were received.

Jurisdiction	Number of Complaints Received	%	Source of Received Complaints	%
Blue Springs	1	2%		
Buckner	0	0%		
Grain Valley	2	4%		
Grandview	12	23%		
Greenwood	0	0%		
Independence	6	11%		
Jackson County	0	0		
Kansas City, MO	24	46%		
Lake Lotawana	0	0%		
Lake Tapawingo	1	2%		
Lee's Summit	0	0%		
Lone Jack	0	0%		
Oak Grove	2	4%		
Raytown	2	4%		
Sibley	0	0		
Sugar Creek	2	4%		
Tarsney Lake	0	0		
		100%		
COMBAT				
Confidential Informant			2	4%
Facebook			0	0%
Task Force Phone Tips			4	8%
Outside Agencies			9	17%
Tips Hotline			8	15%
Combat			29	55%

Jackson County Drug Task Force Awards

Jackson County Drug Task Force named 2017 Missouri Law Enforcement Unit of the Year for fifth time in seven years.

The Jackson County Drug Task Force is clearly—and officially—setting the standard for excellence in law enforcement. In March 2018, for the fifth time in seven years, the Missouri Narcotics Officers Association (MNOA) has honored the Task Force as its Law Enforcement Unit of the Year.

Summary of Investigation

The JCDTF, the Department of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collaborated together to investigate numerous Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) initiatives in 2017 targeting high level drug traffickers operating in Jackson County. This correspondence will highlight two of the more prominent investigations conducted and prosecuted by the JCDTF in 2017. The cases highlighted in this correspondence are investigations in which the JCDTF was the initiating or lead Agency.

In July 2016, the Jackson County Drug Task Force (JCDTF) and the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) Kansas City District Office initiated an investigation targeting the Rodriguez drug trafficking organization (DTO), which was responsible for the distribution of 60 to 120 pounds of methamphetamine per month in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Detectives/Agents conducted numerous undercover purchases, hundreds of hours of surveillance and eight Title IIIs aimed at disrupting and dismantling this DTO. Through the investigation, it was determined that the DTO was operating in numerous states, as well as Mexico. The investigation also resulted in two "spin-off" investigations targeting multi-pound methamphetamine DTOs that were also operating in the Kansas City metro area. During August 2017, 20 defendants were federally indicted on 52 counts of drug and firearms violations. To date, this investigation has resulted in the federal indictment of 40 defendants on 73 charges and the seizure of approximately 210 pounds of methamphetamine, 14 handguns and soft body armor.

During July 2016, the JCDTF and DEA initiated the investigation into the activities of the Rodriguez DTO operating in the Kansas City, Missouri/Kansas Metropolitan area. Detectives/Agents determined the DTO was responsible for the distribution of between 60 and 120 pounds of methamphetamine per month in the Kansas City metropolitan area, as well as supplying methamphetamine to known violent local gangs. As the investigation progressed Detectives/Agents determined that members and affiliates of the DTO were operating in Mexico, California, Arizona, Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois and Ohio as well as other transit states. Detectives/Agents interviewed dozens of potential witnesses and defendants, conducted hundreds of hours of physical surveillance and utilized various electronic surveillance techniques to further the investigation. Based on the Detectives/Agents investigative efforts, this case was designated as an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation in the District of Kansas, Operation Déjà Vu.

Eight Title III wire intercepts were authorized by the court, as well as the collection of cell phone Global Positioning System (GPS) locations and GPS tracking of vehicles. Additionally,

Detectives/Agents coordinated with federal, state and local agencies to coordinate the investigation and out of state interdiction operations. Over the course of the investigation Detectives/Agents coordinated 15 controlled purchases of methamphetamine resulting in the purchase of approximately 13 pounds of methamphetamine. Detectives/Agents were able to coordinate the interdiction of numerous vehicles that were transporting methamphetamine for distribution in the Kansas City metropolitan area as well as several vehicles in other states transporting methamphetamine into Jackson County and the Kansas City metropolitan area for distribution. Detectives/Agents seized approximately 72 pounds of methamphetamine from various members or affiliates pursuant to Operation "Déjà Vu" with an additional 106 pounds of methamphetamine seized during out of state interdiction operations.

Operation "Déjà Vu" led to two separate spin off investigations including a "spin off" wire in support of the OCDETF, Operation "Trailer Park Boys", also investigated by the JCDF and DEA. Operation "Trailer Park Boys" is an active investigation, and to date has resulted in ten arrests, the seizure of eight guns, soft body armor and approximately nine pounds of methamphetamine. Another "spin off" from Operation "Déjà Vu" identified a local DTO that was distributing at least ten pounds of methamphetamine a week in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Additionally, the DTO supplied multiple pounds of methamphetamine to various cities in western Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri and Nebraska. This DTO, headed by a female, was determined to be involved in at least one homicide in St Joseph, Missouri and possibly a second homicide in Liberty, Missouri. At the time of this writing, the possible homicide victim in the Liberty case cannot be located. The Liberty Police Department is investigating the victim's disappearance and has officially classified the case as a missing person's case. Detectives/Agents are actively working with the respective agencies in these investigations.

Due to the violence associated with this "spin off" DTO Detectives/Agents coordinated the arrest of key individuals within the organization. Arrests/interdiction stops were conducted in Cameron, Missouri, Independence, Missouri and St. Louis, Missouri. Those efforts resulted in the arrest of seven suspects, the seizure of six guns, soft body armor and approximately ten pounds of methamphetamine.

In August 2017, the Grand Jury in the Western District of Missouri returned indictments charging 20 defendants in Operation "Déjà Vu" with 52 counts of various drug and firearms crimes. Three other defendants were charged when arrest/search warrants were executed. To date, this investigation has resulted in the federal indictment of 40 defendants on 73 charges, the seizure of approximately 210 pounds of methamphetamine, soft body armor and 14 handguns. Though Detectives/Agents have disrupted this DTO, the investigation is on-going and additional charges expected. Leads from this investigation have led to the above mentioned states and are being followed up on by the DEA and/or local law enforcement agencies.

The second investigation was initiated in April 2016, the Jackson County Drug Task Force (JCDF) and the Home Land Security Investigations (HSI) began looking into the activities of the Chaves-Soto drug trafficking organization (DTO) operating in the Kansas City, Missouri/Kansas Metropolitan area. As the investigation progressed, Detectives determined that members and affiliates of this DTO, using the cover of being race horse owners and trainers, were distributing methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin utilizing a horse ranch known as "Rancho Mexicano". Prior JCDF investigations dating back to the late 1990's indicated individuals associated with "Rancho Mexicano" had been importing drugs from Mexico for distribution in the United States for over 20 years. One affiliate of the DTO was identified in a 2016 JCDF investigation in which approximately 16 pounds of methamphetamine was seized.

With the exception of the 2016 investigation these prior investigations into “Rancho Mexicano” were not able to obtain the evidence required for criminal prosecution of any known affiliates of “Rancho Mexicano”.

During the 2017 investigation, Detectives identified five other “ranches” in addition to “Rancho Mexicano”, operated by affiliates and members of the DTO. Two ranches were located in southern Kansas City/Grandview, Missouri, two in Kansas City, Kansas and one in Wellsville, Kansas.

Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) were investigating the “ranch” identified in Wellsville, Kansas and the Buchanan County Drug Strike Force was conducting an investigation on an affiliate of the DTO who was transporting large quantities of methamphetamine from Kansas City to St. Joseph, Missouri and Buchanan County for distribution. JCDTF Detectives coordinated with all involved federal, state and local agencies to coordinate the investigation, interdiction operations and prosecution. Detectives interviewed dozens of potential witnesses and defendants, conducted over 60 surveillances expending over 650 man hours, and utilized various electronic surveillance techniques to further the investigation. Three (3) Title III wire intercepts were authorized by the court as well as the collection of cell phone Global Positioning System (GPS) locations.

Over the course of the JCDTF investigation Detectives coordinated 18 controlled purchases of methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin from two “ranches” located in Jackson County, Missouri including “Rancho Mexicano”. The controlled purchases resulted in the purchase of approximately 3 pounds of methamphetamine, 370 grams of cocaine and 60 grams of heroin. Approximately 6.5 pounds of cocaine was recovered from the primary suspect in the JCDTF case when he was arrested in a controlled delivery to an ATF Agent at the “ranch” in Wellsville, Kansas. Another 3.5 pounds of methamphetamine and 2 illegal firearms were recovered pursuant to a court authorized search warrant at the residence of a known affiliate of the Chavez-Soto DTO.

In December 2017, 5 defendants were indicted by a federal grand jury on conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance in the JCDTF/HSI investigation. An additional 15 defendants were indicted by a federal grand jury in a \$5.4 million dollar conspiracy to distribute more than 707 pounds of methamphetamine in the Buchanan County investigation. These defendants were charged with conspiracy to distribute, possession with the intent to distribute, conspiracy to commit money laundering and possession a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. The head of this “arm” of the DTO was a Grandview, Missouri resident and was obtaining approximately 70 pounds of methamphetamine a month from “Rancho Mexicano” for distribution in the St. Joseph, Buchanan County area.

The ATF investigation into the “ranch” in Wellsville, Kansas is an active investigation, and to date has resulted in federal indictments of 7 defendants on multiple charges including conspiracy to distribute, possession with intent to distribute and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. Over the course of this investigation, ATF Agents have seized approximately 13 pounds of methamphetamine, 4.5 pounds of cocaine and 29 firearms.

The Sinaloa Mexican Drug Cartel and the La Linea Mexican Drug Cartel were identified as the source for the drugs transported to Jackson County and the Kansas City metropolitan area. Though Detectives/Agents have disrupted these organizations, the investigation is on-going and additional charges are expected. Leads from this investigation have led to the other states and are being followed up on by the Federal and/or local law enforcement agencies.

The investigations described in this correspondence are only 2 of the more prominent investigations conducted by the JCDTF in 2017. Additionally, the JCDTF opened 92 new cases

in 2017 including 2 new OCDETF investigations, and was involved 4 other OCDETF investigations.

Accomplishments for 2017 include:

- One hundred sixty six (166) Federal Cases prosecuted
- Forty seven (47) State Felony cases prosecuted
- One hundred forty (140) controlled purchases of illegal drugs and weapons
- Fifty (50) search warrants executed
- Thirteen (13) controlled deliveries
- Twenty (20) “knock & talk” consent searches

Drug seizures in 2017 include:

- 143 pounds methamphetamine
- 121.3 g cocaine
- 115 pounds marijuana
- 1.75 pounds heroin
- 29.5g PCP
- 1,486 prescription pills

The listed drug seizures in 2017 have an estimated street value of approximately **\$13,461,484**

Jackson County Drug Task Force Receives Midwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area 2017 Outstanding Cooperative Effort Award

In March 2018, the Jackson County Drug Task Force was awarded the 2017 Outstanding Cooperative Effort Award by the Midwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and Office of National Drug Control Policy in Washington D.C.

This award is in recognition of the interactive, cooperative spirit brought to the methamphetamine investigation worked jointly by the Jackson County Drug Task Force (JCDF) and the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Kansas City District Office.

Summary of Investigation

In July 2016, the JCDF and the DEA initiated an investigation involving a drug distribution network operating in Jackson County, Missouri and the entire Kansas City Missouri/ Kansas metropolitan area. This investigation was designated as an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) case Operation "Deja Vu", targeting an identified Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO). The DTO was determined to have been responsible for the distribution of between sixty (60) and one hundred twenty (120) pounds of methamphetamine each month and supplied methamphetamine to known violent gangs in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

During the investigation Detectives/Agents interviewed dozens of potential witnesses and defendants, conducted hundreds of hours of physical surveillance and utilized various electronic surveillance techniques to further the investigation. Eight (8) Title III wire intercepts were authorized by the court as well as the collection of cell phone Global Positioning System (GPS) locations and GPS tracking of vehicles.

Over the course of the investigation Detectives/Agents coordinated fifteen (15) controlled purchases of methamphetamine resulting in the purchase of approximately thirteen (13) pounds of methamphetamine. Detectives/Agents were able to coordinate the interdiction of numerous vehicles that were transporting methamphetamine for distribution in the Kansas City metropolitan area as well as several vehicles in other states transporting methamphetamine into Jackson County and the Kansas City metropolitan area for distribution. Detectives/Agents seized approximately seventy two (72) pounds of methamphetamine from various members or affiliates pursuant to Operation "Deja Vu" with an additional one hundred six (106) pounds of methamphetamine seized during out of state interdiction operations.

Detectives/Agents determined that members and affiliates of this organization were operating in Mexico, California, Arizona, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, and other transit states.

Operation “Déjà Vu” led to two (2) separate spin off investigations including a “spin off” wire in support of the OCDETF Operation “Trailer Park Boys”. Operation “Trailer Park Boys” is also being investigated by the Kansas City DEA and the JCDF. Operation “Trailer Park Boys” is an active investigation, and to date has resulted in ten (10) arrests, the seizure of eight (8) guns, soft body armor and approximately nine (9) pounds of methamphetamine.

Another “spin off” from Operation “Déjà Vu” identified a local DTO that was distributing at least ten (10) pounds of methamphetamine a week in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Additionally, the DTO supplied multiple pounds of methamphetamine to various cities in western Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri and Nebraska. This DTO, headed by a female, was determined to be involved in at least one homicide in St Joseph, Missouri and possibly a second homicide in Liberty, Missouri. At the time of this writing the possible homicide victim in the Liberty case cannot be located. The Liberty Police Department is investigating the victim’s disappearance and has officially classified the case as a missing person’s case. Detectives/Agents are actively working with the respective Agencies in these investigations.

Due to the violence associated with this “spin off” DTO Detectives/Agents coordinated the arrest of key individuals within the organization. Arrests/interdiction stops were conducted in Cameron, Missouri, Independence, Missouri and St. Louis, Missouri. Those efforts resulted in the arrest of seven (7) suspects, the seizure of six (6) guns, soft body armor and approximately ten (10) pounds of methamphetamine.

In August 2017, the Grand Jury in the Western District of Missouri returned indictments charging twenty three (23) defendants in Operation “Déjà Vu” with 55 counts of various drug and firearms crimes.

To date, this investigation has resulted in the federal indictment of forty (40) defendants on seventy three (73) charges, the recovery of approximately two hundred ten (210) pounds of methamphetamine, soft body armor and fourteen (14) handguns. The case is on-going with additional charges expected in the near future.

The geographical scope of this investigation initially was limited to the Kansas City metropolitan area however; leads from this investigation have led to the above mentioned states and are being followed up on by the DEA and/or local Law Enforcement Agencies.

This case is a shining example of the involved Agencies’ longstanding commitment to the disruption of violent DTO’s throughout the region. The joint collaborative contributions of HIDTA initiatives working together in furtherance of the overall objectives of the Midwest HIDTA cannot be overstated.

Jackson County Drug Task Force Receives Midwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area 2017 Outstanding Investigative Effort Award

In March 2018, the Jackson County Drug Task Force was involved in an investigation that was awarded the 2017 Outstanding Investigative Effort Award by the Midwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and the Office of National Drug Control Policy in Washington D.C. The Jackson County Drug Task Force was part of the Kansas City, Federal Bureau of Investigation Combined Task Force which coordinated the undercover activities in the Kansas City metropolitan area.

Outstanding Investigative Effort / Midwest HIDTA

Kansas City FBI Combined Task Force

**Kansas Bureau of Investigations Northeast Region Special Operations
Drug Enforcement Administration Topeka Task Force
Drug Enforcement Administration Kansas City/Overland Park Task Force
Drug Enforcement Administration Oklahoma City Task Force
Franklin County Drug Task Force**

Summary

The Montes/Soto/Griffin joint investigation involved multiple law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, and local level engaged in a concerted effort to dismantle a prolific methamphetamine drug trafficking organization (DTO) in the Midwest Region. The Task Force identified and eliminated the DTO providing funding to a notoriously violent MS-13 gang cell in Topeka. The Mexican methamphetamine sources based in California and weapons traffickers in Kansas were identified, apprehended, and prosecuted. This collaborative effort between law enforcement and state and multi-district federal prosecutors (Western District of Missouri (WDMO) and the District of Kansas (DOK)) resulted in the identification, prosecution, and incarceration of over 50 high-level drug traffickers who were sentenced to over 800 months' imprisonment. These dedicated investigators have clearly demonstrated a very high level of expertise, raw determination, and a work ethic that is undeniable. Through their collective efforts, these law enforcement officers have significantly impacted the region by drastically reducing the flow of illegal drugs and weapons into our local communities, our schools, and our neighborhoods while decreasing the likelihood of gang activity in our streets

Description/Narrative

Beginning in October 2012, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began a long-term investigation of the Montes DTO a multi-pound methamphetamine cell based in California distributing to the metro-areas of both Kansas and Missouri. The FBI identified three Mexican sources of supply who were funneling drugs into the United States through a California DTO led by Domingo Montes. An undercover officer with the FBI (UCO) was introduced to the Kansas cell head by a confidential informant then quickly infiltrated the Kansas DTO. THE UCO made several controlled purchases of over 4,500 grams of high purity methamphetamine resulting in his being introduced to Montes and other members of the Missouri and California DTOs. Six lawful wire interceptions ensued which identified the Kansas, Missouri, and California cell heads as well as their co-conspirators. A Griffin DTO based in Lawrence, Kansas was also identified.

Beginning in December 2012, the Topeka (Kansas) Police Department initiated an investigation targeting Nicolas SOTO-CAMARGO, Jr. the head of the Soto DTO. This investigation was subsequently joined by the DEA, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) and the Kansas, Bureau of Investigation (KBI). SOTO-CAMARGO, Jr., was identified as the leader of the Sur-13 street gang, in Topeka, Kansas, and is involved in the distribution of methamphetamine. Reliable CS information showed that in order to join the Sur-13 gang, a prospective recruit had to commit crimes ranging from fighting, to burglaries or robberies. After members of the gang believed the recruit has committed enough crimes, the recruit would be "jumped" into the gang. Being "jumped" into the gang involved fighting several gang members for thirteen (13) seconds. Once in the gang, in order to move up in rank, the member had to follow instructions of other gang members and continue to commit crimes. The members of the Sur-13 street gang in Topeka, Kansas, are split into several "cliques," with the two main "cliques" being the Mexican Pride Gangsters (MPG) and the Top City Locos (TCL). The TCL clique was started by Rigoberto SOTO, who had been deported to Mexico. The CS identified Nicolas SOTO-CAMARGO, Jr., and Lucas VILLARREAL as the highest ranking members of the TCL. The inner

workings of the TCL mainly involved in the sale of methamphetamine. The MPG will provide protection for the TCL and the TCL supply the MPG with methamphetamine for distribution.

In the fall of 2013, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, DEA Topeka Task Force, Lawrence Police Department, and Franklin County Drug Task Force began an investigation of Damon Griffin's methamphetamine DTO. After a drug related quadruple homicide, officers conducted a search of one of Griffin's enforcers and distributor's telephone, which led to the identification of 22 additional participants beyond those identified in the Montes DTO. Griffin supplied methamphetamine to multiple distributors who serviced Lawrence, Ottawa, Garnett, and rural Franklin and Anderson counties. Griffin's base of operations was in Lawrence, Kansas within walking distance of the University. Griffin and his associates were extremely violent, engaging in shootings, beatings, and arson to enforce drug debts and to maintain territorial control.

Through agency collaboration and shared intelligence, it was determined that the Topeka Soto DTO supplied multi-pound quantities of methamphetamine to the Griffin DTO. Additional investigation revealed that the Montes DTO served as an alternate source of methamphetamine to the Griffin conspirators.

On December 31, 2013, members of the Montes DTO were interdicted traveling from California with approximately 12 pounds of 100% pure methamphetamine destined for the Kansas and Missouri cells. The California and Kansas cell heads discussed the interdiction on the wire. The Kansas DTO leader then began utilizing the mail and car haulers to ship multi-pound shipments of methamphetamine from California to Kansas.

On January 2014, search warrants were executed at Griffin's Lawrence residence and storage unit and Faustino Soto, a member of the Soto DTO's residence. Multiple handguns and assault rifles, an explosive device, assorted rounds of ammunition, \$10,700 cash, seven bags of 99.7-100% pure methamphetamine, scales, and packaging materials were recovered during the Griffin search warrant. Multiple handguns, an assault rifle, assorted ammunition, methamphetamine, and \$16,660 cash were recovered during the Soto search warrant. A Soto DTO member later admitted to delivering hundreds of pounds of methamphetamine to Soto during the conspiracy timeframe.

As a result of several hand-to-hand sales of 100% pure methamphetamine to a CS working for DEA, multiple wiretaps were applied for and granted. The fruits of said wiretaps showed substantial drug sales by SOTO-CAMARGO, Jr., and his family, (sister) Paola Soto-Camargo, (mother) Tomasa Camargo-Simental, a.k.a. "Tomasa Soto-Simental," and (father) Soto-Arreola, Sr., with methamphetamine provided by multiple sources, including Herrera-Aniceto, Zamora-Gutierrez and others. The distributors included Jonathan Alvarado, Roberto Cervantes, a.k.a. "Pito," Timothy P. Luttjohann, Joshua Lee Corwin, Javier A. Martinez, a.k.a. "Pelon," John McCarty, James Oliver Meredith, Paola Soto-Camargo, Ricardo Plasencio, a.k.a. "Ricky," Ricardo Salgado-Romero, Sotero Arreola, and Bryan Wurtz.

On October 28, 2014, pursuant to lawful search warrants issued in this matter, DEA seized items belonging to and in the care, custody and/or control of the defendant, NICHOLAS SOTO-CAMARGO, Jr., a.k.a. "Nick," "Lil One," including but not limited to several assault rifles and handguns were possessed and/or used during and in relation to the drug trafficking conspiracy and over \$170,000 U.S. Currency constituting proceeds of this conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

On November 3, 2014, Oklahoma City, OK DEA (OKC) contacted the DEA Kansas City District Office (KCDO) regarding a seizure of 13 pounds of methamphetamine in a car on a car carrier destined for the Montes Kansas DTO. OKC and KCDO coordinated a controlled delivery to the Montes DTO Kansas cell head through the unwitting car hauler. The Kansas cell head and the DTO lieutenant were arrested attempting to access the concealed methamphetamine.

Between June 2012, and November 2014, in the District of Kansas and elsewhere, the evidence showed that in the Soto OTO: Nicholas Soto-Camargo, Jr., Nicholas Soto-Arreola, Sr., Jonathan Alvarado, Roberto Cervantes, Timothy P. Luttjohann, Joshua Lee Corwin, Francisco Herrera-Aniceto, Javier A. Martinez, John McCarty, James Oliver Meredith, Paola Soto-Camargo, Ricardo Plasencio, Ricardo Salgado-Romero, Sotero Arreola, Tomasa Camargo-Simental, Bryan Wurtz, Salvador Zamora-Gutierrez; and in the Montes OTO: Domingo Montes, Felipe Sifuentes-Cabrera, Estaquio Marquez, Jose Rios-Morales, Daisy Roman, Petsamai Phommaseng, Eladio Marquez, Abraham Alcaraz, Jose Marin Soriano, Guillermo Morales, Robert Wimberly, Yuri Campos, Enrique Castenada, and Aromlak Singmanichanh; and in the Griffin OTO: Damon Griffin, Faustino Soto, Julie Clifton, Dana Griffin, Justin Wheeler, Anthony Martinez, Petsamai Phommaseng, Ashley Griffin, Leslie Ann Timm, Richard White, Matt Evans, Sherry Ferguson, Arlie Stewart, Chad Smith, Jeremy Burgess, Charles Bradley Grissom, Johnathan Martin, Shawn Shutts, Kevin Smith, Justin Ingram, Elizabeth Lewis, Todd Coulter, and other persons engaged in various substantive drug crimes, firearms offenses, and acts in furtherance of a conspiracy to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute methamphetamine. The prosecutions spanned from 2014 to 2017, with Damon Griffin being sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment, Faustino Soto being sentenced to 40 years' imprisonment, Soto-Camargo being sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, and concluding with Domingo Montes being sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment in October 2017. Over 50 defendants were charged and convicted in the joint investigation and prosecution which included 17 separate federal, state, and local agencies; 8 case agents from 5 separate entities; 4 state prosecutor's offices; 4 federal districts (Kansas, Western District of Missouri, California, and Utah); and 6 federal prosecutors. All defendants entered guilty pleas or were convicted at trial. The defendants received sentences totaling over 800 months' imprisonment and were collectively subjected to the forfeiture of over 50 firearms and approximately \$4 million dollars in money judgments.

**JACKSON COUNTY
DRUG TASK FORCE**

2018

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, December 20, 2018

KC, St. Louis Area Residents Indicted for \$8.5 Million Meth Conspiracy

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – A dozen residents in the Kansas City, Mo., and St. Louis, Mo., areas have been indicted by a federal grand jury for their roles in an \$8.5 million drug-trafficking conspiracy that distributed more than 1,000 pounds of methamphetamine over two years.

Trevor Scott Sparks, 29, Gerald L. Ginnings, 38, Gloria May Jones, 29, Vicente Araujo, 22, Leslie Ladon Walker, 31, and Paul J. Kibodeaux, 35, all of Kansas City, Mo.; Markus Michael A. Patterson, 36, of Grandview, Mo.; David Robert Richards II, 31, of Louisburg, Kan.; Christian Douglas Hansen, 39, of St. Louis, Mo.; and Stephanie Thurmond, 28, Leeanna Michelle Schroeder, 25, and Adam Joseph Mainieri, 30, all of Winfield, Mo.; were charged in a four-count superseding indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo., on Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2018. That indictment was unsealed and made public upon the arrests of several defendants.

The federal indictment alleges that 11 of the defendants (with the exception of Sparks) participated in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine from Jan. 1, 2017, to Dec. 12, 2018. According to the indictment, conspirators received \$8,508,500 in exchange for the unlawful distribution of more than 1,001 pounds (455 kilograms) of methamphetamine, based on an average street price of \$8,500 per pound of methamphetamine.

Sparks is charged with engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise that involved the distribution of methamphetamine. According to the indictment, Sparks was the principal leader of the criminal enterprise and obtained substantial income from the criminal enterprise.

All 12 of the defendants are also charged with participating in a money-laundering conspiracy during that time to use drug sale proceeds to promote the drug-trafficking conspiracy and to conceal the proceeds of that drug-trafficking conspiracy.

Eleven of the defendants (with the exception of Kibodeaux) are charged together with possessing firearms in furtherance of violent crimes and drug-trafficking crimes.

Ginnings, Sparks, Patterson, Jones, Hansen and Mainieri also are charged together in one count of being felons in possession of firearms and ammunition.

The indictment also contains a forfeiture allegation, which would require the defendants to forfeit to the government any property obtained from the proceeds of the drug-trafficking conspiracy, including a money judgment of \$8,508,500.

The charges contained in this indictment are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Bruce Rhoades. It was investigated by the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department, the Jackson County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the FBI and the Jackson County Drug Task Force.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

Eight Indicted for \$2.1 Million Meth Conspiracy

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Eight defendants were indicted by a federal grand jury today for their roles in a \$2.1 million conspiracy to distribute nearly 100 kilograms of methamphetamine.

Juan Guzman, also known as “Flaco,” 37, Luis Carlos Ramos Caraveo, 23, and Maria De La Cruz Nava, 22, all citizens of Mexico residing in the Kansas City, Mo, area; Chanthacone Senthavy, 44, a citizen of Laos residing in Independence, Mo.; Shelby Lanae Peterman, 26, Christopher Shawn Sharp, 40, and John Paul Gnat, 28, all of St. Joseph, Mo., and Jacob Dale Walsh, 32, of Denton, Kan., were charged in a four-count indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Kansas City, Mo. Today’s indictment replaces a federal criminal complaint that was filed against Guzman and Senthavy on Oct. 19, 2018, and contains additional defendants and charges.

The federal indictment alleges that all eight defendants participated in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine and in a money-laundering conspiracy over a nearly four-year period from Jan. 1, 2015, to Nov. 14, 2018. In addition to the conspiracies, Guzman, Senthavy, Caraveo and Nava are charged together in one count of possessing firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking. Guzman is also charged with illegally reentering the United States after having been deported.

The indictment also contains a forfeiture allegation, which would require the defendants to forfeit to the government \$2.1 million, allegedly the proceeds of the drug-trafficking conspiracy (based on a sale price of \$600 per ounce and distribution of more than 3,500 ounces – nearly 100 kilograms – of methamphetamine).

According to an affidavit filed in support of the original criminal complaint, law enforcement investigators had identified Guzman as the supplier for the conspiracy. He allegedly provided one person with three kilograms of methamphetamine every other day; and another person with five kilograms of methamphetamine at each purchase. Guzman and Senthavy were arrested at Guzman’s residence on Oct. 18, 2018. At the time of their arrest, officers seized two rifles, three handguns, ammunition, methamphetamine, cash and drug paraphernalia from Guzman’s residence.

The charges contained in this indictment are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Bruce Rhoades. It was investigated by the Buchanan County, Mo., Sheriff’s Department, the Jackson County Drug Task Force, the Drug Enforcement Administration.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, June 14, 2018

KC Man Sentenced to 14 Years for Distributing Meth

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – A Kansas City, Mo., man was sentenced in federal court today for distributing methamphetamine.

Elisardo Meza, 40, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Roseann Ketchmark to 14 years in federal prison without parole.

On Jan. 3, 2018, Meza pleaded guilty to distributing methamphetamine. Meza admitted that he sold more than 200 grams of pure methamphetamine to a confidential informant working for the Drug Enforcement Administration.

This is Meza's sixth felony conviction, five of which involved drugs, and his second federal felony conviction in this district involving drugs. Meza was on probation at the time of the offense.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney David Raskin. It was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Jackson County Drug Task Force.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

KC Man Sentenced to 15 Years for Meth, Illegal Firearm

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – A Kansas City, Mo., man was sentenced in federal court today for his role in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine and for illegally possessing a firearm.

Russell S. Lawson, 45, of Kansas City, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Beth Phillips to 15 years and eight months in federal prison without parole.

On Nov. 20, 2017, Lawson pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine and to possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug-trafficking crime. Lawson admitted that he distributed at least 408.61 grams of pure methamphetamine during the conspiracy.

Undercover law enforcement officers and a confidential source made numerous purchases of methamphetamine from several members of the conspiracy, including Lawson. In his plea agreement, Lawson specifically admitted to a series of drug transactions that occurred at his residence from Nov. 10, 2015, to June 16, 2016.

On Nov. 17, 2016, law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at Lawson's residence and seized a Browning .22-caliber semi-automatic handgun from Lawson as well as three rifles from his residence. Lawson admitted that he had been in possession of the handgun on Jan. 11, 2016, when he told an undercover officer that he expected to be robbed and hoped that they would come to the house so he could "headshot" them. Officers also discovered additional methamphetamine in the residence.

Lawson is the fifth defendant to be sentenced, among six defendants who have been convicted in this case. William L. Dunkin, 47, of Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced on May 24, 2018, to 10 years and nine months in federal prison without parole. Derek A.F. Fields, 33, of Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced on Feb. 22, 2018, to four years in federal prison without parole. Tiffani L. Campbell, 40, of Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced on Jan. 31, 2018, to 10 years in federal prison without parole. Barbara L. Daniels, 54, of Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced on Jan. 11, 2018, to three years in federal prison without parole. Paul V. Chavez, 29, of Kansas City, Mo., pleaded guilty and is scheduled to be sentenced on July 26, 2018.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Trey Alford. It was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Jackson County Drug Task Force.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, July 11, 2018

KC Man Sentenced to 25 Years in Prison for Meth Trafficking

Law Enforcement Operation Resulted in Fatal Shooting

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – A Kansas City, Mo., man was sentenced in federal court today for possessing nearly five kilograms of methamphetamine to distribute during a law enforcement operation in which another individual was fatally shot.

Michael J. Wilkins, 27, of Kansas City, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Howard F. Sachs to 25 years in federal prison without parole.

Wilkins pleaded guilty on Feb. 6, 2018, to possessing methamphetamine with the intent to distribute. Wilkins admitted that he was a leader of a major methamphetamine distribution operation. Wilkins, under surveillance by law enforcement, was seen entering a known methamphetamine stash house in the 3000 block of S. Bellefontaine Avenue in Kansas City, Mo., on June 8, 2016. When Wilkins left the house, he was carrying a box and a backpack, which he placed in his vehicle.

Law enforcement officers approached Wilkins while he was getting into his vehicle and attempted to detain him. Wilkins fled on foot and was subsequently taken into custody. In his path of flight, which was captured by the National Guard counterdrug helicopter surveillance, officers recovered one of his shoes, his cell phone and a handgun.

Officers executed a search warrant on Wilkins's vehicle and found 4,764 grams of methamphetamine and \$12,363 in the box and backpack he had carried from the stash house.

During the foot chase of Wilkins, law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at the Bellefontaine residence. That operation led to an hours-long standoff when persons inside the house fired shots at law enforcement officers. Luis Carlos Garcia-Aguilar, also known as "Moe," fired several shots at officers then ran from the house with his rifle aimed at the officers; he was fatally shot.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Matthew Moeder. It was investigated by the Jackson County Drug Task Force, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, October 9, 2018

Independence Business Owner Sentenced for Distributing K2, Accepting Food Stamps

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – The owner of two Independence, Mo., stores was sentenced in federal court today for distributing synthetic cannabinoids, also known as K2, and for accepting food stamps as payment for K2.

Haq Nawaz Choudhry, 53, of Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. Chief District Judge Greg Kays to three years and six months in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered Choudhry to pay \$3,275 in restitution to the USDA and a money judgment and forfeiture to the government of \$27,443.

Choudhry is the president of H Habib Enterprises, Inc., which owned the Short Stop convenience store and Kerns Liquor, located next door to each other at 9013 E. U.S. 40 Highway in Independence and operated by Choudhry. On Feb. 6, 2018, Choudhry pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to distribute a controlled substance and controlled substance analogue, and to participating in a money-laundering conspiracy.

An undercover Jackson County Drug Task Force detective and three people conducting undercover transactions on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture made a series of purchases from both Short Stop and Kerns from Feb. 14 to Oct. 22, 2013. The undercover purchases used cash on some occasions, and EBT cards (used to redeem Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP – benefits, also known as food stamps) on other occasions, to purchase synthetic cannabinoids.

During the course of the investigation Choudhry concealed the sale of synthetic cannabinoids by conducting financial transactions through the point-of-sale terminal, using EBT cards. The purchases would routinely be processed as “food purchases” with funds electronically deposited into the company’s bank account, thus concealing the proceeds of the synthetic cannabinoids sales. Choudhry specifically admitted, for example, that he fraudulently processed a \$46.50 purchase of synthetic cannabinoids using SNAP benefits on May 30, 2013.

Law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at Kern’s and Short Stop on Oct. 22, 2013. Officers recovered synthetic cannabinoids and drug paraphernalia from both businesses. Officers also seized \$21,135 from Short Stop and \$308 from Kerns. Choudhry was not present during the execution of the warrant. On Feb. 11, 2014, officers returned to Kerns and Short Stop based on a complaint that the business was selling K2 again. Choudhry was contacted and denied that any such sales were occurring, and gave written permission for the detectives and officers on scene to search both of his stores for illegal items. Officers recovered additional synthetic cannabinoids and drug paraphernalia from Kerns. Officers also seized \$6,000 from Kerns.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Adam Caine. It was investigated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General and the Independence, Mo., Police Department.

**Jackson County Drug
Task Force**

2018

Media Release

KCUR 89.3 Public Radio

While Opioids Grab the Spotlight, the Meth Epidemic Grows Worse Than Ever

By ALEX SMITH • SEP 5, 2018



Do-it-yourself methods of producing methamphetamine made possible the rise of "mom-and-pop" meth labs in the '90s.

Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department

[Listen to Interview:](#)

Starting in the mid-1990s, Capt. Dan Cummings worked as an undercover cop going after meth suppliers in his hometown of Independence, Missouri.

He had grown up seeing what meth could do, so for him the work was personal.

“When I was a kid, a cousin brought a bag of this white powder in and said, ‘Man, hey, you gotta try this stuff. Man, you can go forever,’” Cummings says. “He did. He’s now passed on.”

For years, Missouri was notorious for having the most meth labs in the country. Today, the small-scale “mom-and-pop” labs have all but disappeared, and much of the conversation about drugs has shifted to opioids.

But Missouri’s meth problem is far from over.



Independence, Missouri, home of the annual Santa-Cali-Gon days festival, was once the home of scores of mom-and-pop meth labs.

CREDIT ALEX SMITH / KCUR 89.3

Cummings used to pose as a biker looking to buy large quantities of meth to sell. He had no trouble finding it in Jackson County, which a Rolling Stone article once dubbed “the methamphetamine capital of America.”

He witnessed first-hand the growth of easy-to-build and extremely combustible mom-and-pop meth labs made possible by the cold-cook method, which uses over-the-counter cold medications to manufacture meth.

“Everything you needed could be purchased at Walmart or your local feed store, and you could set up your own little meth lab in your house or your apartment or your car. Carry it around in a cooler,” Cummings says.

For several years, the Jackson County Drug Task Force, on which Cummings worked, was busting a lab an average of every few days.

He still remembers the smell of homemade meth, which he recalls as similar to cat urine mixed with Coleman camp fuel, making it possible to literally sniff labs out.

“It’s like barbecue. You know once you smell Gates barbecue, you walk by, you go, ‘Wow, that’s Gates barbecue,’” Cummings says. “You know what a meth lab smells like, and you go, ‘Wow, there’s a meth lab somewhere around here.’”

Jackson County started working to limit the sale of pseudoephedrine, which is used to make meth, several years before the state and federal government passed laws doing so. As a result of efforts like those, the task force has only uncovered one mom-and-pop lab in Jackson County in the last five years.

But as homemade meth disappeared, it was quickly replaced by professionally made meth from Mexico, which has continued to get cheaper and more potent every year.

Erik Smith, assistant special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Kansas City office, says the problem of Mexican meth has now eclipsed what was seen during the mom-and-pop meth lab days.



“It’s much higher, because its being produced at a much higher rate, shipped to the U.S. at a much higher rate and consumed at a much higher rate,” Smith says. “That’s why it still remains our No. 1 threat.”

Erik Smith, assistant special agent in charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Kansas City office, says Mexican produced meth is his office's No. 1 threat.

CREDIT ALEX SMITH / KCUR 89.3

The Midwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, a coalition of law enforcement groups, had its biggest year ever for meth seizures in 2017, removing more than two tons of meth from the region.

But public perceptions have not kept up with the reality.

Susan Whitmore, president and CEO of First Call, a Kansas City nonprofit that provides substance abuse recovery help, says that while the opioid epidemic dominates the headlines, meth remains second only to alcohol as the substance for which people most often seek treatment.

Despite meth’s lingering reputation as a drug for lower-income white people, Whitmore says it’s now used across demographics groups.

“I think methamphetamine is still associated with poverty,” Whitmore says. “What we’ve known forever is that these things affect all of us, across the board.”

Meth has also become more dangerous.

Twenty years ago, emergency rooms typically saw meth users after an accident — say, a car crash. Today, they more often show up experiencing chest pains or having a mental health crisis.

While opioids still make up the majority of drug overdoses, overdose deaths nationwide involving increasingly potent meth grew by 13 times between 2000 and 2016.

Cummings says he's frustrated that kids in Independence are surrounded by meth that's more plentiful and dangerous than anything he saw growing up.

But he says he can at least take consolation in this: These days they're not likely to live with the dangers of neighborhood labs.

"I can take to the bank that my neighborhood's not going to catch fire in Independence," Cummings says. "The house next door to my mother, where she's lived for 50 years, is not gonna blow up because some yahoo moved in there with a meth lab."

Alex Smith is a health reporter for KCUR. You can reach him on Twitter [@AlexSmithKCUR](#)

Lee's Summit Tribune

Jackson County Drug Task Force

Mallory Herrmann

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The Jackson County Drug Task Force doesn't get a lot of coverage in the media. A team of covert and undercover officers from agencies across the county, they generally prefer it that way.

But over the years, they've found success as a unit, as an

example of countywide cooperation and as an outstanding investigative agency in the region.

The Jackson County Drug Task Force (JCDF) was formally established in 1986 to combat drug problems in the county. It's currently funded through COMBAT, the Community Backed Anti-Drug Tax, which is a Jackson County quarter-cent sales tax that generates more than \$20 million each year for a variety of anti-crime initiatives.

The task force uses resources from 12 area police departments, including the departments in Lee's Summit, Lake Lotawana, Greenwood and Raytown, as well as the county sheriff's department and the Missouri State Highway Patrol. 29 investigative and clerical personnel are assigned to the unit.

JCDF has just two main objectives: responding to drug problems that pose an immediate threat to the community and providing long-range analysis of drug-related problems in order to more effectively police them.



Captain Dan Cummings, officer-in-charge for the JCDF, says the drug problems the county sees aren't ones "we can arrest our way out of." He knows the challenges are complex, including addiction.

"If you're an addict, we want to get you off it, get treatment," Cummings says.

But they also want to know who's supplying you.

Cummings doesn't want to participate in fear-mongering: it's not his intention to create anxiety or panic. But he also says there's a lot happening below the surface that people just don't know about.

He describes the drug cartels as organized, professionally run organizations. Their employees are tested to ensure they're not using the drugs they're selling. They have regular calls to discuss sales trends and product quality. Their personnel are embedded in communities, including Jackson County.



"They work hard. They're sending money back home," Cummings says.

But he says it's the task force's job to make it difficult for them to make a profit here. The task force is there watching, keeping the cartels looking over their shoulder.

And they're succeeding. The task force is regularly engaged in months-long and multi-year investigations into drug-trafficking organizations operating in the area. When they make successful arrests, they leverage that information to track larger trafficking networks and higher members of the cartels – rather than celebrating those wins publicly.

The task force operates on an annual budget of about \$2 million from COMBAT revenues. Cummings knows that while they don't often attract publicity, they're still accountable to the taxpayers who fund their work and that it's these funds that allow the task force to pursue higher-level investigations.

"We're spending your money and we're spending your money exactly how we're supposed to," he says.

The officers assigned to the task force are cross-commissioned to be able to cross state lines in pursuit of federal cases. They often sacrifice time with their families, sometimes working 24- and 48-hour shifts to further an investigation. The task force regularly collaborates with agencies throughout the metro area, including the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Homeland Security.

In 2017, JCDTF was part of the Kansas City FBI Combined Task Force that was awarded Outstanding Investigative Effort by the Midwest HIDTA (High Intensity Trafficking Area program, a federal enforcement program).

JCDTF also received the 2017 Outstanding Cooperative Effort award, the second year in a row that they've received this award. The regional award was nominated for 2017 national recognition.

The investigation for which they received the award resulted in the federal indictment of 40 defendants on 73 drug and firearms charges, as well as the seizure of 210 pounds of methamphetamine and 14 handguns.

JCDTF has also been recognized as Law Enforcement Unit of the Year by the Missouri Narcotics Association in five of the last seven years.

The task force includes the police departments of Blue Springs, Buckner, Grain Valley, Grandview, Greenwood, Independence, Lake Lotawana, Lee's Summit, Lone Jack, Oak Grove, Raytown, and Sugar Creek. The Jackson County Sheriff's Department, Missouri State Highway Patrol, and Missouri National Guard also supply personnel and support to the task force.

JACKSON COUNTY DRUG TASK FORCE COMMITMENT

Jackson County is a primary market area for production, distribution and abuse of dangerous drugs. Although progress has been made in many areas, continued vigilance, enforcement, treatment and education is required. The Jackson County Drug Task Force will continue its successful tradition through community partnerships and a united cooperative effort against illegal narcotics.

Although limited by financial and personnel constraints, the Jackson County Drug Task Force will continue to provide the citizens of these communities the professional service that they have come to deserve and expect. The members of this Task Force have made a commitment to this office, the law enforcement profession and the citizens of this community that no information concerning the illegal sales of narcotics will go without proper investigation. With that in mind, we will strive to continue to improve on the quality of service to this community.

The Jackson County Drug Task Force actively solicits tips and information regarding all illegal narcotics activity. Should the information be related to a jurisdiction outside of Jackson County, personnel from this office will assure that the information is passed on to the proper investigative agency. Individuals having information to pass on may contact this office through phone in complaints at 816-655-DRUG, via the Jackson County, Missouri Web Site, jacksongov.org, or through the TIPS hotline, 816- 474-TIPS.