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U.S. Attorney: Wheeling Island a 'Destination' For Drug Trafficking

26 Indicted on Drug Charges in Wheeling

By ALAN OLSON
 Staff Writer

WHEELING — The U.S. attorney's office in Wheeling announced 26 people have been indicted on various charges for drug activity that mostly occurred on Wheeling Island, the majority of which were committed by Ohio residents.

U.S. Attorney Bill Powell spoke briefly Thursday afternoon at a small press conference at Heritage Park, overlooking the banks of Wheeling Island, where Powell said drug activity had been most focused, although it also occurred elsewhere in the city. Powell said a 50-count indictment had been brought down on 26 individuals, mostly Ohio residents.

"It became apparent to our investigators that Wheeling, and Wheeling Island specifically, had become a destination for Ohio-based drug trafficking organizations."

Of the 26 people indicted, 20 are from Ohio, mostly in Columbus and Cleveland, Powell said.

"These individuals treated our communities as some kind of drug lazar, and violated the safety of its communities. Drug trafficking often brings firearms, which are the tools of the trade, and other crime incidental to drug trafficking enterprises in our neighborhoods, and they did so here."

Powell said residents deserve to feel safe in their own neighborhoods, while trafficking activity was happening at several protected spaces, such as Madison Elementary and playgrounds around the island.

"No neighborhood or community, no matter where it's located, no matter what part of town, no matter the economic status within that community, will ever be surrendered to drug trafficking organizations. Every



Photo by Alan Olson

U.S. Attorney Bill Powell, flanked by numerous law enforcement personnel, announces a string of indictments Thursday in Wheeling.

studies, deserves a safe place to live," he said. "The full weight of federal law enforcement will be pursuing not only the individuals who commit these crimes, but also those who provide the means for them to do so. ... We will not tolerate those who come here and use our neighborhoods as the center for their criminal activity."

Wheeling Police Chief Shawn Schwertfeger said he was pleased with the communication that took place to bring forth the indictments, including the Ohio Valley Drug and Violent Crimes Task Force, Drug Enforcement Administration, West Virginia State Police, Ohio County Sheriff's Office, and the Wheeling Police Department. The U.S. Marshals Service, Columbus Police Department, Gang Crimes Unit, the

and the Bellaire Police Department also assisted.

"I want to thank the community. Without their attention and their dedication, and the even flow of information, many of these indictments would not be possible."

Schwertfeger was happy to announce that as of Wednesday, the police department had issued their first drug house abatement violation. The drug house ordinance, introduced last year, aims to provide mechanisms for police to order landlords and homeowners to cease "vice" crimes on the premises after documented evidence of either two misdemeanors or one felony occurring on the property. Such abatement typically means eviction, but Schwertfeger said other measures were possible as well.



Photo by Scott McCloskey
 Triadelphia Middle School student Summer Ashmore, right, assists Alyssia Freeman with packing out colorful drawing backpacks at the YSS back-to-school event at The House of the Carpenter on Wheeling Island Thursday. Freeman visited the YSS event with other students and the staff of Newb's Ark Childcare & Learning Center.

YSS Provides School Supplies To Local Families

By SCOTT McCLOSKEY
 Staff Writer

WHEELING — A small group of children from a local daycare center packed out colorful drawing backpacks at Youth Services System Inc. provided local families and students with resource packets and other school supplies at one of two Ohio County Schools' food distribution sites Thursday as part of the agency's annual back-to-school event.

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While YSS is unable to hold their annual Celebrate Youth festival at Wheeling Park this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency decided to till provide students the "tools they need for school this fall" by "piggybacking" on school food distribution sites set up at House of the Carpenter on Wheeling Island and Bridge Street Middle School in Elm Grove, according to YSS board

member Missy Ashmore.

"It's kind of the best we can do given the circumstances," Ashmore explained, as she assisted other volunteers with YSS, the Wheeling Island Lions Club, The House of the Carpenter and UniCare as they loaded supplies in cars as they wore masks.

"Thousands of children in the community would come not only for the school supplies,

but the whole community came together and gave away all sorts of donations," Ashmore said, while commenting about the annual back-to-school YSS picnic that began in 2008. "So this is a smaller scale this year. We have hundreds of backpacks that we are giving out at this location, as well as at Bridge Street Middle School today," she commented.

The resource packets

provided each family a large variety of pamphlets from area family service agencies.

"We just wanted to somehow get this paperwork in the hands of each of the families just so that they know there is support out there. ... We want to support the families in the community and the children," Ashmore said.

YSS special events coordinator Terra Crews, who was

assisting with loading supplies at the Bridge Street location where cars were backed up from the entrance to the school parking lot to National Road, said they were extremely busy.

She said they expected to distribute 3,500 backpacks between the two sites.

"This is such a gift to our community to be able to do this," Crews said.

