

# JACKSON COUNTY DRUG TASK FORCE



2011

# ANNUAL REPORT

*(The pictures within this Report are items recovered, seized or purchased during 2011.)*

## **HISTORY**

In 1986, the Jackson County Missouri Drug Task Force (JCDTF) 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 JCDTF 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 drugs and drug related crimes. One of the enforcement initiatives COMBAT would fund was the JCDTF.

The tax was renewed for a seven-year period in 1995, 2004 and again in 2009. The COMBAT tax provided the JCDTF with an adjusted budget of \$1,825,477 in 2009.

The JCDTF 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 basis.

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

The County of Jackson has approximately 604.84 square miles. With a population of 674,158 in the 2010 Census, Jackson County is the second most populous of Missouri's counties, after St. Louis County. The JCDTF primarily focuses on the eastern and southern portions of the county, which includes all suburban jurisdictions and unincorporated areas. The purpose of the JCDTF is to provide a combined and unified response to the drug and narcotics problem as it exists in eastern Jackson County, Missouri.

While JCDFTF 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 order to assist and further in these efforts, in 2010 the process was begun for several members of the JCDFTF to obtain Federal commissions in order to better conduct joint operations.

During 2010, the JCDFTF initiated a long term plan for vehicle replacement and site location in order to reduce the daily operating costs and increase long term sustainability for Task Force operations.

In 2011, an agreement was signed with the Missouri National Guard to provide one Intelligence Analyst to assist with long term investigations. An agreement was also formed with The Office of Homeland Security (Formerly ICE) for the federal deputization of several JCDFTF detectives to assist in long term larger drug investigations.

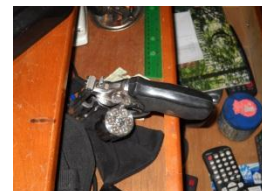
### ***Controlled substances seized and purchased***

2011	Marijuana \$7 / gm	Methamphetamine \$100 / gm	Cocaine \$100 / gm		PCP \$10 / gm	Heroin \$175 / gm	Pharmaceutical Pills \$20 / each
			Powder	Crack			
Pounds	23.12	92.91	8.77	.43	.42	N/A	N/A
Ounces	374.69	1505.16	142.21	7.08	6.96	.60	N/A
Grams	26,638.94	42,279.22	4226.17	198.38	195	16.87	469
\$Value	\$186,472	\$4,227,922	\$422,617	\$19,838	\$1,950	\$2,952	\$9,380



### ***Firearms seized and purchased***

Long Guns \$200 / each	Hand Guns \$400 / each
7	29
\$1,400	\$11,600



### ***Investigative Statistics Comparison Years 2010 / 2011***

	2010	2011
<b>Cases Opened</b>	149	201
<b>Cases Closed</b>	67	32
<b>Search Warrants</b>	71	42
<b>Knock-n-Talks</b>	78	56
<b>Presentations</b>	6	12
<b>Narcotics Purchases</b>	178	127
<b>Money Recovered</b>	\$140,602.00	\$111,134.00
<b>Meth Labs Processed</b>	7	4
<b>Marijuana Grows Processed</b>	8	1
<b>Psilocybin Mushroom Grows</b>	6	0

***Although the numbers are down in several areas, this is directly attributed to the larger cases being generated by Task Force personnel, resulting in larger seizures of drugs, and more cases being filed. Cases are not listed as closed until prosecution is completed.***



### ***Prosecution Comparison Years 2010 / 2011***

	<b><i>Local</i></b>		<b><i>State</i></b>		<b><i>Federal</i></b>	
	<b><i>2010</i></b>	<b><i>2011</i></b>	<b><i>2010</i></b>	<b><i>2011</i></b>	<b><i>2010</i></b>	<b><i>2011</i></b>
<b><i>Cases Presented for Prosecution</i></b>	32	17	47	85	5	186

***This is an overall increase of 421% in cases files at the State and Federal Level.***

## 2011 DRUG COMPLAINT REPORT

During 2011, there were 153 drug complaints received by the Jackson County Drug Task Force. The following is a statistical break down of the location of the received complaints, along with a listing of the source of the received complaints.

	Jurisdiction of Complaints Received	%	Source of Received Complaints	%
Blue Springs	14	9.1%	0	0.0%
Buckner	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Grain Valley	13	8.4%	1	.6%
Grandview	29	18.5%	14	9.1%
Greenwood	1	.6%	1	.6%
Independence	40	26.1%	3	1.9%
Jackson County	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Kansas City MO	25	16.3%	0	0.0%
Lake Lotawana	1	.6%	0	0.0%
Lee's Summit	7	4.5%	0	0.0%
Lone Jack	1	.6%	0	0.0%
Oak Grove	6	3.9%	0	0.0%
Raytown	5	3.2%	0	0.0%
Sugar Creek	10	6.5%	4	2.6%
Sibley	1	.6%	0	0.0%
COMBAT			5	3.2%
Informants			6	3.9%
JCDTF Investigation			12	7.8%
Phone Call / E-Mail			59	38.5%
TIPS Hotline			31	20.2%
MSHP			17	11.1%



## **SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS - BY JURISDICTION**

*It should be noted that these are not all of the cases within each jurisdiction, but some of the more noteworthy.*

**BLUE SPRINGS** - A search warrant was executed on a residence based upon an ongoing JCDTF investigation. Items recovered during the execution of the warrant included a large quantity of marijuana and one loaded handgun.

**GRAIN VALLEY** - JCDTF Detectives responded to a residential area on the report of a meth lab. On arrival it was determined that a suspect was acting suspicious near a family gathering. Police responded and caught the subject after a short foot pursuit. In the subjects possession was a duffle bag containing the components of a meth lab.

**GRAIN VALLEY** - During the course of an ongoing investigation, JCDTF Detectives responded to a residence to contact the occupant about several drug complaints. During the course of the conversation, consent was given to search the residence for drugs. Recovered during the search was drug paraphernalia, a large amount of marijuana and PCP.

**GRAIN VALLEY** - During the course of an ongoing investigation, JCDTF Detectives responded to a residence to contact the occupant about several drug complaints. During the course of the conversation, consent was given to search the residence for drugs. Recovered during the search was drug paraphernalia and marijuana. The resident also admitted to dealing drugs at one of the local schools.

**GRANDVIEW** - A search warrant was executed on a residence based upon information received within a drug complaint along with an ongoing JCDTF investigation. The Grandview Tactical Unit assisted in the execution of the warrant. Recovered during the execution of the warrant included a quantity of methamphetamine and drug paraphernalia.

**GREENWOOD** - A search warrant was executed on a residence based upon several drug complaints, along with an ongoing JCDTF investigation. The suspect was believed to be involved in several area burglaries. Recovered during the search was drug paraphernalia and marijuana.

**INDEPENDENCE** - During the course of a joint investigation with the Lafayette County Drug Task Force, the Independence Career Criminal Unit and the Jackson County Drug Task Force, a search warrant was executed at a residence based upon received information and surveillance. Intelligence information identified the subject to have a hidden "bomb shelter" and surveillance cameras located at the residence. Due to the subjects criminal history, along with the intelligence information received, the Independence Special Response Team assisted in the execution of the warrant. Recovered during the execution of the warrant and arrest was methamphetamine and drug paraphernalia.

**INDEPENDENCE** - Following up on information received on a possible meth cook within Independence, several detectives responded to a residential address and contacted the subject. During the course of their conversation, consent was given to search the residence for drugs. As a result of the consensual search, methamphetamine, drug paraphernalia, guns, ammunition, and four one-pot meth labs were recovered.

**INDEPENDENCE** - During the course of an ongoing drug investigation, members of the Jackson County Drug Task Force, assisted by the Independence Criminal Investigations Unit, executed a search warrant at a local residence believed to be full of stolen property. The Independence Police Department Tactical Team assisted in the execution of the

warrant. Located during the execution of the warrant was marijuana, drug paraphernalia, and a large amount of stolen property.

**JACKSON COUNTY (UNINCORPERATED)** – Working with information received in a drug complaint, JCDTF detectives responded to a residence and received consent to search the same. Recovered during the course of the search was several pounds of marijuana and a large quantity of U.S. Currency.

**KANSAS CITY** - A search warrant was executed at a suspected gang hangout, based upon information received in a drug complaint and drug buys. Due to the gang association and weapons seen at the residence, multiple KCMOPD Street Narcotics Unit (SNU) Tactical Teams were utilized. Recovered during the execution of the warrant was a large quantity of PCP, marijuana, drug paraphernalia, ammunition, body armor and a large quantity of U.S. Currency.

**KANSAS CITY** - A search warrant was executed at a suspected drug stash house based upon surveillance and several drug buys. All targets were stopped and arrested after they left the residence. Recovered during the execution of the warrant was a large quantity of methamphetamine, packaged as if it was just received. The targets of the investigation were immediately detained by the U.S. Marshall's Service.

**KANSAS CITY** - A search warrant was executed at a residence based upon a long term investigation. Recovered during the execution of the warrant was a large amount of U.S. Currency, Crack Cocaine, and the equipment necessary to convert Cocaine to Crack Cocaine.

**OAK GROVE** - During the course of a long term Federal conspiracy investigation, a resident of Oak Grove was identified as being the source of large quantities of Oxycontin for at least two dealers within Blue Springs. After several undercover buys, the subject was arrested and indicted in Federal Court with the other conspirators.

**RAYTOWN** – During the course of a joint investigation with the Department of Homeland Security, a residence check was conducted, during which consent was given by the resident to search the residence for evidence of drug trafficking. Recovered during the search of the residence was a large amount of U.S. Currency and one handgun. The vehicle of the residence was further identified as having hidden compartments used for the transport of illegal drugs. In addition to being suspected of drug violations, the residents were identified as illegal aliens.

**SUGAR CREEK** – Following up on information received in a drug complaint, detectives conducted surveillance on a residence and observed an individual acting suspicious. During the course of the stop, the suspect was found to be in possession of a vehicle stolen from Independence and a motorcycle stolen from Liberty. Although the individual appeared to be under the influence of narcotics, none were found.

**RECORD BUST / METROPOLITAN AREA** – During the course of a long term investigation, a vehicle was stopped by Uniform Patrol Officers in ***Blue Springs*** that resulted in the discovery of a small amount of methamphetamine. Along with other information, this led investigators to a location that was already under investigation for drug trafficking in ***Kansas City, MO***. Upon conducting a search warrant, followed by surveillance and a buy / bust, a few pounds of methamphetamine was located. With the assistance of Federal Agents, the continuing investigation as to the source of the drugs led detectives to locations within ***Kansas City, KS*** and ***Overland Park, KS***. After two days of buy/busts and search warrants, law enforcement had recovered a total of 74 pounds of liquid and crystal methamphetamine, 2 pounds of



cocaine, U.S. Currency and several firearms. This is a case that would not have had such a successful result without the cooperation between the Jackson County Drug Task Force, Blue Springs Police Department, Jackson County Sheriff's Department, Kansas City Kansas Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration and Homeland Security (Formerly ICE).





## **DRUG TRENDS**

**Methamphetamine** continues to be a problem in the Metropolitan area. It is readily available, user prices are reasonable and purity levels are acceptable. Law enforcement in the area is faced with two primary issues in addressing the sources of methamphetamine. Local production of methamphetamine in small portable labs is a continuing



concern from both an enforcement aspect and as a public safety issue. Although they do not produce much product, the labs are a regular source of supply for addicts. The cleanup of these clandestine labs is a drain on manpower and resources.

<b>Methamphetamine Labs Reported</b>						
	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Jackson County</b>	18	23	16	21	24	15*
<b>Missouri</b>	1284	1285	1487	1774	1960	1889*

*\*Includes Laboratories, Chemical/Equipment/Glassware seizures, and Dumpsites. These numbers reflect the incidents as reported to EPIC NSS through November 2011.*

Jackson County as well as areas across the country is seeing a dramatic increase in the discovery of “ONE POT” methamphetamine clandestine laboratories. A one pot methamphetamine lab is generally contained in a 16 to 20 ounce soda or Gatorade bottle, but can be in any bottle, jar, etc. The “cook” combines common methamphetamine lab chemicals such as Lye, Camping fuel, Lithium battery strips, and anhydrous ammonia. These containers are a high risk for flash fires which are a threat to law enforcement and citizens alike.



The second problem is the proliferation of imported methamphetamine. This product is brought into the area in large quantities from California and the Southwest Border States with the original source being Mexico. Traffickers of imported methamphetamine tend to work in both cells and structured groups. These groups can be and are penetrated



with longer-term investigations. Leaders predominantly have no ties to the area or the United States and thus they are flight risks. Members use multiple identities in an effort to confuse authorities. Intelligence information has been received that some wholesalers come to the area to deal large amounts of methamphetamine for a short period of time, make what money they can and then leave the area.



**Cocaine and Crack Cocaine** is available throughout the metropolitan area. Indications are that cocaine will continue to be a problem because the incoming amounts translate to a product that is relatively affordable and easily procured. Crack and powder cocaine are

prevalent in Eastern Jackson County and together are judged to be the number three (3) and four (4) drugs of choice behind marijuana and methamphetamine. Generally cocaine powder is brought into the metropolitan area from the Southwest Border States and California. Importers use a variety of transportation techniques depending on the amount they are bringing in. Once here it is either sold in powder form or converted to crack. Cocaine abuse ranges from casual users of powder to those addicted to crack and other narcotics. Retail distributors are usually found to be individuals associated with small groups who have ties to more organized groups. The larger drug trafficking organizations have direct ties to out of state and international sources. Enforcement efforts and cooperative investigations have been successful against dealers, wholesalers and importers. Any investigation into individuals or smaller groups always focuses on moving up the distribution chain.

**Marijuana** is readily available in all areas of Jackson County. It is the most abused and preferred drug in the area, and has commonly be referred to as the “gateway drug”, or one that leads to abuse of other substances. Marijuana is commonly found to be used in combination with other drugs and / or narcotics.



Marijuana is either locally cultivated or imported into the area. In the suburban / residential areas cultivation has been seen in small indoor grow operations. Operations such as this have been seen on a more regular basis over the past year. In rural settings, outside the metropolitan area, marijuana is grown in large outdoor plots. Enforcement of grow operations focuses on destruction of the plants and prosecution of the offender, usually at the state level when there are no extenuating circumstances or other crimes.



The source for imported marijuana is usually the Southwest Border States and California. Mexican organizations bring it across the US border for distribution with other drugs such as methamphetamine and cocaine. Enforcement targeting importers focuses on the entire organization and the other associated narcotics.

**Heroin** is becoming more prevalent and available within the metropolitan area, and is being seen in small quantities on a more regular basis. Dealers are frequently individuals who possess and sell only small amounts. Many of the dealers and abusers know each other and operate as a small subculture.



**Psilocybin mushroom** seemed to have taken a decline in popularity within the past year. The temporary rise in grow operations seems to have discontinued. Psilocybin mushrooms are not widely available on the open market at this time indicating that abuse is not widespread.

**MDMA/Ecstasy and LSD** is available in Eastern Jackson County. This is a concern because MDMA/Ecstasy and LSD users tend to be high school and college aged youth. Both of these drugs are known to be used at popular parties known as raves and in club settings. Manufacture of these drugs involves a complex chemical process and there is no known production in the area. LSD is imported from California in a variety of different methods. MDMA/Ecstasy is manufactured and imported from outside the US. LSD has been encountered in sporadic instances but it does not appear to hold the popularity or availability it once had in the area.

**PCP (phencyclidine)** is recognized as an extremely dangerous drug due to its psychological effect on users, and is rarely been seen within the area. PCP is often applied to marijuana and smoked. In previous years, availability ranged from somewhat limited in Eastern Jackson County to easily obtainable in the center of the metropolitan area. Over the past year PCP is becoming more easily available within Eastern Jackson County.



**Oxycontin, Vicodin and other prescribed pharmaceutical drugs** are commonly abused in Jackson County. Diversion occurs through fraudulent prescriptions, “doctor shopping”, robberies and burglaries. Abusers and dealers consist of individuals and / or groups of individuals. Although not



typically formed into organized beginning to form into small distribution and sales of the recent cases, the suppliers are legitimate 30 day prescriptions, at a drastic markup. The dealers would then sell the product at 3-4 times their initial costs.



groups, some of these individuals are networks for the purpose of various pharmaceuticals. In several individuals that have obtained which they in turn sell to the dealers

## **JCDTF 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 655-DRUG, via the JCDTF Web Site or through the TIPS hotline, 474-TIPS.

# JACKSON COUNTY DRUG TASK FORCE

## 2011 PRESS RELEASES & NEWS ARTICLES



## Kansas City, Kan., Man Indicted After Arrest With 20 Pounds of Methamphetamine

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 8, 2011

KANSAS CITY, KAN. – A Kansas City, Kan., man arrested with more than 20 pounds of methamphetamine has been indicted on federal charges, U.S. Attorney Barry Grissom said today.

**Jose Garcia**, 36, Kansas City, Kan., is charged with one count of possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine, one count of distributing methamphetamine, one count of maintaining a residence at 302 South Valley Street, Kansas City, Kan., in furtherance of drug trafficking, and one count of unlawful possession of a firearm after a felony conviction.

Garcia initially was charged in criminal complaint filed Aug. 15. The complaint alleges that on Aug. 11, 2011, investigators working undercover paid Garcia \$3,500 for methamphetamine. When investigators served a search warrant at Garcia's residence at 302 South Valley Street they found 10.3 kilograms (22.7 pounds) of methamphetamine hidden in a cinder block wall in the backyard. They also seized more than \$8,700 in cash.

Upon conviction, the crimes carry the following penalties:

Possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine: Not less than 10 years and not more than life and a fine up to \$4 million.

Distribution of methamphetamine: Not less than five years and not more than 40 years and a fine up to \$2 million.

Maintaining a residence in furtherance of drug trafficking: A maximum penalty of 20 years and a fine up to \$500,000.

Unlawful possession of a firearm after a felony conviction: A maximum penalty of 10 years and a fine up to \$250,000.

The Kansas City, Kan., Police Department, the FBI and the Jackson County, Mo., Drug Task Force investigated. Assistant U.S. Attorney Trent Krug and Assistant U.S. Attorney Dave Zabel are prosecuting.



## **Mexican National Sentenced for Meth Conspiracy**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 10, 2011

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - Beth Phillips, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Mexican national was sentenced in federal court today for his role in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

Francisco Rodriguez-Guerra, also known as Felipe Camarena, 24, a citizen of Mexico residing in the Kansas City, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Greg Kays to 12 years and seven months in federal prison without parole.

On March 16, 2011, Rodriguez-Guerra and co-defendant Gilberto Baldenegro-Valdez, 28, also a citizen of Mexico, were convicted by a jury of participating in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. Baldenegro-Valdez was sentenced to 13 years in federal prison without parole on Sept. 20, 2011.

Rodriguez-Guerra and Baldenegro-Valdez, both of whom were illegally present in the United States, sold high grade, pure methamphetamine to a confidential informant during two controlled transactions on March 21, 2010.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Justin G. Davids and Brian P. Casey. It was investigated by the FBI, the Jackson County Drug Task Force and the Independence, Mo., Police Department.



# County lands grant to help in drug fight

**Submitted to The Examiner**

Posted Aug 05, 2011 @ 02:30 PM

Independence, MO — The Jackson County Multi-Jurisdictional Drug Task Force will receive a hefty sum of funding to help fight drug crime.

Out of the \$1.8 million in drug task force and law enforcement grants to fight crime in the Kansas City area, the Jackson County DTF will receive \$321,378

According to a press release issued by the Missouri Department of Public Safety, the grants are designed to combat illegal drugs and drug-related crimes, and to strengthen law enforcement efforts.

“These grants are designed to make Missouri communities safer and stronger by bolstering the state’s highly effective Multi-Jurisdictional drug task forces in the battle against drugs and drug-related crime,” John M. Britt, director of the Department of Public Safety, said in the release.

“The grants should make a real difference by allowing these law enforcement agencies to continue to devote significant resources to the fight against illegal drugs.”

Other agencies that received the money include:

- The Kansas City Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force will receive \$389,410
- The Sheriff’s Office in Carroll County will receive \$8,539.
- The Clay County Drug Task Force will receive \$455,118.
- The Drug Abatement Response Team in Jackson County will receive \$247,910.
- The Lafayette County Narcotics Unit will receive \$177,705.
- The Platte County Multi-Jurisdictional Enforcement Group will receive \$286,711.

Including these Kansas City area initiatives, a total of \$7.1 million in federal Edward J. Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants is being awarded to 27 multi-jurisdictional drug task forces operated by counties and municipalities; one program that responds to clandestine methamphetamine labs and provides important supplies to emergency response personnel; two prosecutorial efforts to combat drugs; one program focused on preventing drug use through education and early intervention; one prosecutorial program to investigate sexual and domestic abuse; two law enforcement agencies for records management system purchases; three law enforcement agencies for equipment purchases; and one program that assists the Department of Public Safety develop crime fighting strategy.

The grants will utilize \$1.3 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Calls to the Jackson County DTF were not immediately returned Wednesday.

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# City works to shed meth moniker

Independence takes different approaches to help reduce the problem

By **Adrianne DeWeese** - [adrianne.deweese@examiner.net](mailto:adrianne.deweese@examiner.net)

**The Examiner**

Posted May 16, 2011 @ 02:30 PM

Independence, MO — The magazine's cover shows images from the animated sitcom "South Park," the long-running show for adult audiences then in its infancy.

Flip to page 50, however, in the Feb. 19, 1998, edition of Rolling Stone magazine, and there begins a five-page article that altered the perception of Independence for the next decade.

"Jackson County has become something of a national model for its meth-eradication strategy," the article states on its final page, but that is hardly the portion most readers remembered.

On its second page – the article's opening spread – the author writes of Independence ditching its 1830s title as the City of Zion.

"Now it's the City of Meth," the article states.

And so began the title of Independence as "the meth capital of the world," but during the past 15 years – even before the Rolling Stone article was published – multiple agencies across the Kansas City area have worked to eradicate the tag line.

It's a problem that has involved the collaborative efforts of the Independence Police Department, the 22-year-old Community Backed Anti-Drug Tax in Jackson County and drug treatment programs. According to them, the recent statistics don't lie: They've accomplished their goal, though the war on meth continues as a work in progress.

## **A LOCAL EFFORT**

Statistics are sometimes misleading, law enforcement officials say, because the high numbers indicate that an area is staying ahead of a problem.

"In actuality, the reason those numbers were so high was because we were vigorously attacking the meth problem," said Independence Police Chief Tom Dailey, adding that the metropolitan area worked together in fighting the area's meth issue, something he was aware of during his previous employment with the Kansas City Police Department.

Similarly, Dailey said, the Independence Police Department is now aiming to stay ahead of the synthetic drug problem, such as those drugs packaged as "bath salts."

“The label ‘meth capital of the world’ or America is ubiquitous in the fact that it exists in several places at the same time,” said Tom Gentry, public information officer for the Police Department. Though Iowa had just 286 reported meth incidents and seizures in 2010, T-shirts and baseball caps calling the state “the meth capital of the world” are readily available for purchase on the Internet.

Missouri continues to lead the nation in meth incidents, with 1,917 incidents involving labs, dump sites and chemical/glassware seizures reported in 2010. That was an 8.9 percent increase from 2009 when Missouri had 1,761 incidents and seizures. Still, the past two years’ statistics represent a decrease compared to 2004, when the state had 2,820 incidents, the highest number from 2004 to 2010, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

In the late 1990s, the federal government formed the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program, and Independence recently renewed its role with HIDTA with the assignment of two full-time detectives to the organization. The program has the resources to go after larger drug organizations, Dailey said, while the Independence Police Department has the capability to target mid-level drug organizations, as well as street dealers.

The HIDTA effort in the beginning was significant, Dailey said, because the association helped with dangerous meth lab cleanup efforts, as well as providing training and education.

The Police Department also has staff members assigned to the Jackson County Drug Task Force, which the Independence, Blue Springs, Buckner, Grain Valley, Lake Lotawana and Sugar Creek police departments all play a role in, as well as the Jackson County Sheriff’s Office and Missouri State Highway Patrol, among other agencies.

A list of suspected drug houses is supplied to Independence police officers, and many of the houses are verified through tips provided on the narcotics hot line, Dailey said. Neighborhood watch groups and individual residents also provide information to the Police Department when they witness suspected drug activity.

“Our primary purpose is to arrest them,” Dailey said. “That’s what law enforcement does: We arrest people who conduct illegal activities.”

Those arrests, he said, also serve as a deterrent to others who are thinking about participating in illegal drug activities in Independence. The drug trade is a connection for other crimes, such as credit card theft, burglary, robbery, motor vehicle theft and prostitution, Dailey said.

“So, it’s not just only attacking the meth problem,” he said, “but it’s also attacking other problems people use to buy the meth.”

According to the Independence Police Department, no meth-related seizures have taken place in Independence so far in 2011, though COMBAT officials say one incident has taken place this year in Grain

Valley.

In 2010, Independence recorded six meth incidents, and Sugar Creek had one. The Independence statistic represents a 78.2 percent decrease compared to a five-year high of 23 incidents in 2007.

But, Dailey said, the seizures in 2010 were mostly the pop bottle “rolling” labs, Dailey said, which use a “shake-and-bake approach” – and smaller amounts of chemicals found in cold medications – to “cook” meth.

So, does Independence have its meth problem under control?

“What do those numbers say to you?” Dailey said of the most recent statistics. “I’m really hesitant to talk about control. I would say that we are ahead of the curve. ... All you can do is deter crime from coming into your city. I can tell you the officers in this department have a motto of ‘not in our city.’”

### **A REGIONAL EFFORT**

At the height of the issue roughly 15 years ago, Vince Ortega was working at the Kansas City Police Department. In the early 1980s, he worked as an undercover detective with KCPD, tackling the crack cocaine epidemic and then the meth problem.

Today, Ortega is the assistant director of operations for COMBAT, which funds about \$2 million annually for a drug task force that includes undercover drug enforcement officers, an officer in charge, two clerks and a supervisor.

“At one time, yeah, that was definitely it,” Ortega said of the mid-1990s and the “meth capital of the world” tag line in Independence. At that time, he said, several hundred labs were seized each year in the city.

Ortega said he recognizes that statistics are misleading at times. In conversations with HIDTA officials and Dan Cummings, officer-in-charge for the Jackson County Drug Task Force, Ortega said he has learned that while the lab situation in Independence has been reduced, the demand for meth still exists.

A majority of the meth is coming from Mexican drug cartels, Ortega said, and local law enforcement officials continuously work with the Mexican government to deport illegal Mexican drug dealers who live in Independence, eastern Kansas City and North Kansas City.

That’s why COMBAT is so important, Ortega said. It educates children, especially those identified as at-risk, about bullying and gang culture mentality. COMBAT officials also have met with treatment providers to look at where “gaps” exist, such as why those in treatment often find themselves back in the criminal justice system.

“We’re looking at a comprehensive way of doing business better so that the left hand knows what the right hand is doing,” Ortega said. “Also, we’re looking at an approach that addresses individual needs and not

one cookie-cutter method, even at the prevention level.”

## **A TREATMENT APPROACH**

Comprehensive Mental Health Services Inc. saw “a much higher incidence” of individuals with meth addictions a decade ago, said Kay Murphy-Collins, director of the center’s addiction recovery program since 2000.

“Meth addiction is an extremely difficult addiction to overcome,” she said. “Those people who came to us back in 2000 have probably been back, on average, two or three times, just because the meth addiction is so very difficult to overcome.”

Comprehensive Mental Health serves between 650 and 700 clients annually at its Independence office, and nearly half of those clients are between 31 and 45 years old. According to statistics from July 2010 through February 2011, 36 percent of clients have alcohol as their primary drug of choice, while one-fourth of clients prefer meth and an additional 25 percent seek crack cocaine as a primary drug of choice.

During the past decade, media reports have educated the public on the effects of meth, Murphy-Collins said, contributing toward the reduction of meth addict cases seen at the center. She also credited intensified police intervention, along with collaborative efforts among police, prosecutors, probation, parole and the drug courts.

“(They are) very much attuned to the fact that treatment works for these folks better than prison or jail,” Murphy-Collins said. “We get a lot more referrals now from the courts than, say, when that Rolling Stone article was written. ... It sounds like that it’s still on the top of people’s agendas that we don’t want this area of the country to become the meth capital again. I think the police and the Drug Task Force have worked really hard to eliminate that title of ‘meth capital.’ I think there’s been a really good job done.”

Dailey, Ortega and Murphy-Collins each acknowledged the collaborative efforts of different agencies – and community members – who came together and continue to do so in fighting meth.

“It’s not just a law enforcement effort. It’s a community effort,” Dailey said. “There’s no way you can battle the drug problem without the help of the community. We can’t be everywhere. We couldn’t hire enough cops.”

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