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Creston raid nets four arrests, 31 felony charges

By CHEYENNE ROCHE

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 Expand




During an MJET search of a residence on the 1100 block of North Maple Street in Creston Monday, officers located and seized 13 firearms, five rooted marijuana plants, methamphetamine and drug paraphernalia. (Contributed by MJET)

Only months after local law enforcement agencies partnered to create the Multi-Jurisdictional Entry Team (MJET), the team is making a difference not just in Union County, but in surrounding counties as well.

In November, the team has conducted search warrants in Redding, Clearfield, Lenox, Lorimor and Creston resulting in 13 arrests, 47 felony charges and more than 40 seized firearms.

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MJET includes officers from Creston and Afton police departments, deputies from Union County and a Ringgold County paramedic.

On Monday, MJET conducted search warrants inside a residence on the 1100 block of North Maple Street in Creston. The search resulted in four arrests and 31 felony charges. Confiscated were drugs, guns and paraphernalia.

The eight MJET members led the search, assisted by officers from Creston Police Department, Union and Ringgold County Sheriff's Offices and the Iowa Division of Narcotics Enforcement.



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Charges

All persons are presumed innocent until proven guilty

“The investigation had been taking place over a considerable amount of time. In that investigation, there became evidence that established probable cause that supported a search warrant for that residence,” MJET’s leader, Sergeant Shannon Arends said. “We had probable cause to believe there was a marijuana grow operation in the residence.”



Arends

According to a Creston Police report, a marijuana grow was discovered in the residence during the search. Five plants with the root system intact were seized.

“A grow operation is basically plants being grown inside the residence,” Arends said. “There’d be a ventilation system, lighting system, heating system. Each plant when they are fully grown has the potential for a pound of yield. So each plant is going to produce a pound of marijuana.”

Residence owner Scott Lemon, 41, and Christopher Cerda-Romo, 31, of Lenox, were taken into custody and each charged with five counts of conspiring with intent to deliver marijuana under 50kg and five counts of failure to affix drug tax stamp for one or more processed plants.

“Each particular plant holds a charge,” Arends said. “Even though they’re illegal, they have to have a federal drug stamp affixed to each plant.”

Jason Ford, 43, of Creston, was taken into custody on the charge of sex offender registration violation, first offense. Ford was found to be living at the searched residence, but was not registered as living there.

Ford was transported to the Union County Jail where he was later released on a promise to appear.

Cerda-Romo was also charged with possession of a controlled substance - methamphetamine, first offense. He was transported to the Union County Jail where he is being held on a \$51,000 cash or surety bond.

In search warrant conducted at the same residence in 2021, eight firearms were located and seized. At the time of the warrant and recovery of firearms, Lemon had active protective orders which each warned Lemon of the penalties for possessing firearms and ammunition while the protective orders were in place.

As a result, Union County served a warrant Monday for the charges of two counts of violation of a no contact/protective order and seven counts of possession of a firearm of offensive weapon by a domestic assault offender. Lemon was transported to the Union County Jail where he is being held on a \$60,000 cash or surety bond.

None of the original eight firearms were returned to Lemon; however, during the search Monday, 13 firearms were located - 11 long guns and two pistols. Though charges have not been filed for the weapons, Arends said charges are pending.

“When we do something like this and we have initial charges, we have time to assess things so we’re not rushing to judgement,” he said. “We’re looking at all the different aspects before we file a charge.”

MJET will be running the serial numbers on the firearms through the national database to see if they are stolen, but there could be charges even if they were not stolen. “You can’t possess firearms and manufacture narcotics at the same time,” Arends said. “That’s an additional charge.”

The raid lasted nearly eight hours and included the search of a three-story house, two sheds and a garage. Many paraphernalia items were discovered, including bongs, baggies, pipes, scales, fertilizer, grow lights and a ventilation system.

“We basically have to do it on a room by room basis,” Arends said. “It has to be a systematical and consistent search. Lots of times what we are looking for are very small items and they could be hidden virtually anywhere. The officers have to look through everything, and we’re not on a quest to destroy people’s property, so it does take a lot of time.”

Approximately two hours into the active search, Casey Welcher, 30, of Afton, walked into the residence. Officers saw Welcher and detained him. Upon a search of his person, officers located 10 grams of methamphetamine, a pipe and a small amount of marijuana.

Welcher was taken into custody on the charges of possession of a controlled substance - methamphetamine, third offense; possession with intent to manufacture or distribute methamphetamine over 5g and possession of marijuana, third or subsequent offense. Welcher was transported to the Union County Jail where he is being held on a \$32,000 cash or surety bond.

Partnership

Arends said MJET is accomplishing exactly what he hoped it would do. "We're actually exceeding my expectations," he said. "I figured this year would be more of a building year, and then we would see the bulk of our results next year after we got all our things in place, but it's taken off a lot faster than I thought it would."

The team started the month assisting Ringgold County with back to back searches in Redding and Clearfield.

The Redding search resulted in one arrest - Josh Levy, of Redding, and Clearfield resulted in three arrests - Jason Parker, Margaret Williams and Jonathan Lovell, all of Clearfield. The Clearfield search recovered more than 25 firearms, marijuana, methamphetamine, drug paraphernalia and property that was believed to be stolen from Ringgold and Taylor counties.

"The drug problem isn't subject to just Creston; it's everywhere," Arends said. "(MJET) not only gets us the resources to impact the problem like with a TACT team, but also gives us a system where we can network with other departments so we can share intel."

On Nov. 16, MJET was deployed to a Lorimor residence for a search. It resulted in the arrest of Gunner Holtry of Winterset and Dillon Savage and Bonnie Decker, both of Lorimor.

Guns, syringes, marijuana, methamphetamine, marijuana wax, packaging materials, drug paraphernalia and assorted prescription pills were seized in the search.

On Nov. 21, the team was called to Lenox to assist Taylor County in a search. The operation resulted in the arrests of Jonathan Junez and Antonio Munoz, both of Lenox.

According to a Taylor County Sheriff's Office report, during the search, a liquid substance that contained a detectable amount of methamphetamine was located, weighing approximately 20.5 grams.

Also located was paraphernalia and a firearm. Investigation prior to the search warrant corroborated Munoz was known to be involved in the distribution of narcotics. The check on Munoz's history also showed he is a convicted felon prohibited from owning firearms.

Adapting

As the team becomes more utilized in the community, they have made adjustments to address their changing needs.

The most recent change is the addition of a drone and drone operator to the team. "The drone would give us an eye in the sky and a great deal of officer safety while they are conducting the search," Arends said. "It can see potential problems as they are rising other than react after they've impacted the team. It gives the team the freedom to focus on the dangers inside with a little peace of mind that something isn't going to come in from behind."

Eventually, Arends would like the team to get a thermal imaging drone in order to assess threats prior to the entrance of the residence.

Thermal-imaging would allow the team to see people inside a building before entering. This is especially important when looking at a residence with multiple outbuildings. They would quickly be able to locate where all the people are.

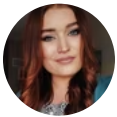
Arends said he thinks their heavy workload will open the community's eyes to how needed this is to combat Creston's drug problem.

“Our goal is to rid Creston as much as possible of the drug problem,” Arends said. “People are tired of the drug problem in Creston. The more we can do to eradicate those problems, the more it helps all the aspects. Cutting down the drug problem dramatically decreases your other crimes such as theft and assaults. A lot of those are related in some way or another to the drug problem.”

Last year, the Creston Police Department conducted approximately 25 search warrants, recovered nearly \$300,000 worth of stolen property and seized 50 guns. Their six search warrants in November paces them to complete 150 warrants in a 12-month period.

“I am hoping that in the future, it’s going to be very difficult for them to do business here,” Arends said. “If they’re not concerned about MJET, they’re not opening their eyes, and maybe they should. My suggestion is to give up the business and find something more constructive, or they’ll probably meet the team first hand.”

Creston



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Originally from Wisconsin, Cheyenne has a journalism and political science degree from UW-Eau Claire and a passion for reading and learning. She lives in Creston with her husband and their two little dogs.

