

Gary Knepp tells the story of Ohio Gov. John M. Pattison of Milford



...and chocolate fudge? Check out this unusual, delicious recipe



Taft Museum's Philip Long hopes to raise \$1 million for the May re-opening



Community Journal

Clermont

Serving Amelia • Batavia • Williamsburg • New Richmond • Batavia Township • Ohio Township • Pierce Township • Union Township • Williamsburg Township

Vol. 34 No. 16

www.communitypress.com

Wednesday, January 14, 2004

50¢



The Community Press

Because community matters.

Briefly

Questions for candidates

In a few short weeks, Clermont County residents will be voting in the primary election for Republican and Democrat candidates for state senate, state representative, county recorder and coroner. Four communities will be asked to consider school levies.

In preparation for the primary, the *Community Journal* will be interviewing every candidate, some for endorsements, and every school district with a levy on this ballot.

In addition to our own questions, we would like to know what you want to know from candidates and school district officials. We have questions ready to ask the candidates and school districts, but would like to include questions from our readers, as well.

If you have a question about an issue, race or for a candidate, e-mail them to Editor Theresa L. Herron at theron@communitypress.com. Call her at 248-7128 or fax her at 248-1938.

Forums about WC levy

West Clermont Local School District will host three information meetings to discuss the current financial situation of the district and the need for the 7.9-mill levy on the March 2 ballot.

The first meeting is 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 15, at Willowville Elementary. The second meeting is 10 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 31, at Glen Este High School. The third meeting is 1 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8 at Amelia High School.

The meetings are open to the public.

Index

- Employment Classified
- Obituaries A12
- Police reports A6
- Services Directory Classified
- Sports A9
- Viewpoints A4

Reach us

Editor: Theresa L. Herron
Call: 513-248-8600 ext. 223
Fax: 513-248-1938
E-mail: clermont@communitypress.com
Delivery: 513-248-8600, ext. 300
Classified: 513-242-4000
Sports: 513-248-8600, ext. 227
Web site: www.communitypress.com
Additional contact information: Page A4

© 2004, The Community Press
all rights reserved

ADVERTISERS!



Call about our Fire Safety Page

- publishing on Jan. 21-22
- Kids' activity page
- Fire safety tips
- A definite advertising opportunity

CALL 513.242.4000



6 53174 24040 8



Two narcotics agents and a firefighter work at a meth lab. Each wears a gas mask and the two narcotics agents wear hazardous chemical "moon suits" because the ingredients used to make meth are so hazardous and explosive.

Seeking solutions

Many Clermont residents may not know anyone who uses or makes methamphetamine. They may not even know what meth is, but they are already affected by it.

Meth labs do not just impact those who make and ingest the drug. Meth contaminates the places where it is made, and contaminates the residents – including the children and animals. In Clermont County these places, have been homes, trailers, apartments and cars. The discarded byproducts contaminate waterways, soil and air with powerful chemicals like battery acid used in the manufacturing process.

However, meth labs usually are not hidden. They could be just next door because the chemicals can be bought at a local grocery store and the process requires only household items like everyday dishes, paper towels, aluminum foil, funnels, blenders and hot plates.

Many of the items are stolen and many of the users are unemployed. Many county agencies are working in tandem toward a county-wide solution.

• ADDITIONAL STORIES ON A3, A7

STORIES REPORTED AND WRITTEN BY BRANDI BROWN, GINA DiMARIO, MOLLY WILLIAMSON; EDITED BY THERESA L. HERRON.

It's all in the enforcement

Yellow caution tape lines the edges of a yard and the road is blocked off. Spinning red and blue lights of police cruisers and fire engines in front of one home illuminate the area, bouncing off homes and trees and highlighting officers in "moon suits" carrying out hazardous materials and escorting people out in handcuffs. Nearby, neighbors watch the action.

It sounds like a scene from a movie or evening news clip from an inner city drug bust, but it's a scene Clermont

County Narcotics Task Force agents can describe detail by detail because it has happened many times in almost every township.

Clermont County is known for having one of the highest number of illegal methamphetamine labs in Ohio. But according to county officials, it's not the number of labs Clermont has, but rather the number found and prosecuted since 2001 that has brought the county fame.

THE BEGINNING

Clermont County began paying "a

great deal of attention" to meth trends late in 2000, said Bill Williams, Clermont County Narcotics Task Force director. The task force members share information with law enforcement agencies across the country and saw meth making its way east from California.

When meth labs in Missouri began to "dramatically increase" in late 2000, jumping from 15 to 20 one year to hundreds the next, Williams approached Clermont County Sheriff A.J. "Tim" Rodenberg about training an officer to

deal with this trend.

"We knew it was an epidemic that needed to be addressed," Williams said. "We knew if we did not have someone properly trained, by the time (meth) reached Clermont County, we would be totally unprepared."

To begin the fight, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency provided the training and gave Clermont County start-up equipment like chemical-resistant cloth-

Meth

Continued on A3

Meth is highly addictive, toxic

Methamphetamine is not an ordinary home-cooked high, it is a toxic blend of chemicals that users cannot seem to get enough of and more people are trying.

Meth is a highly addictive drug that provides a euphoric rush. It can be injected, ingested, snorted, smoked or even sprinkled on food, said Rick Combs, chief deputy at the sheriff's office.

Meth is worse than crack because it is so easily produced, said both Bill Williams, Clermont County Narcotics Task Force director, and a task force agent, whom the Community Press is not naming for safety reasons.

"If I am going to ingest poison, might as well ingest one I can make myself," Williams said.

Cocaine comes from South America and heroin comes from Asia. Meth comes from anywhere, the narcotics agent said.

"There are no transportation issues," the narcotics agent said.



GINA DiMARIO/STAFF

Anthony Brock, Clermont County assistant prosecutor, left, Sheriff A.J. "Tim" Rodenberg, center, and Prosecutor Donald White discuss the dangers of methamphetamines and describe what Clermont County law enforcement agencies and prosecutors are doing about it.

"Meth ... could destroy the fabric of our society."

Clermont County Sheriff A.J. "Tim" Rodenberg

"Anybody can go up to the store and buy the ingredients to make it. In essence, every person in the county could be a suspect for cooking dope."

Meth has become a "very attrac-

managers working with offenders on probation. Offenders sentenced for

Toxic

Continued on A3

Toxic

Continued from A1

using marijuana or other drug charges generally have tried meth.

"Meth could be the worst drug (we've) encountered because it is not controlled," said Clermont County Sheriff A.J. "Tim" Rodenberg. "It could destroy the fabric of our society. It could be completely devastating because it is so potent."

The health effects of meth are bad because it causes a "lot of wear and tear on your body," Hargitt said. One client had not slept in a month.

The drug is "extremely addictive, on par with smoked cocaine," said David Levine, TASC research and data case manager supervisor. The nature of meth abuse is "extremely destructive" because users go on long binges.

"(The after effects) with meth are even worse than cocaine," Levine said. "Cocaine is a very rapid but short-term high, but meth lasts longer. You can stay stimulated for up to 24 hours from one hit, but they use it three or four times a day to stay up."

Since the drug is so physically addictive, users will do anything to get more, Levine said. They engage in more antisocial behavior like stealing from family members and friends, and the drug makes them more violent, so users often are charged also with assaults and domestic violence.

Jill Gomez, vice president of Clermont Recovery Center, disagrees that meth is physically addictive. She said it is mentally addictive, while heroin is more physically addictive.

However, meth is a much more dangerous drug because the chemicals used to make it are toxic and lead to neurological damage, Gomez said.

"Most of us in our wildest moments would not think of put-

"Most of us in our wildest moments would not think of putting ether, Freon and hydrochloric acid in our bodies. It seems insane to do that, but they are ingesting that."

Jill Gomez

Clermont County Recovery Center vice president

ting ether, Freon and hydrochloric acid in our bodies," Gomez said. "It seems insane to do that, but they are ingesting that."

Meth is "not a physically addiction, but it is horrendously psychologically addicting," said Dr. Rodney Vivian, a psychiatrist at Mercy Hospital Clermont who works with meth users. The user does not have physical withdrawal symptoms, but he or she "feels miserable" during the withdrawal period. Meth also "sets the user up for chemical brain damage" such as lifelong depression.

A meth user is "a different breed of cat," Clermont County Sheriff A.J. "Tim" Rodenberg said. Users range in age from "barely 18" to people in their 50s.

are "claw marks," paranoia and jittery behavior, Combs said.

The open sores and scratch marks are usually because users think they have crank bugs under their skin, said the narcotics agent.

"When you are over stimulated by a drug, nervous habits become extreme," Levine said. "Any nervous habit becomes really exacerbated and you are prone to anxiety."

Most meth users have a prior record and are violent, which sometimes makes it difficult to arrest them, Combs said. They also usually have at least one or two guns on hand.

Williams said meth users go about their daily activities much like anyone else. "They conduct some semblance of a social life.

But their perceptions are not normal."

The tendency toward paranoia and violence is there, whether at home or in public. Williams said as he

watches the popularity of meth, grow he can tie violence to it.

"There has been a dramatic rise in domestic violence," Williams said.

Adolescents tried in Clermont County Juvenile Court are not coming in on meth-related crimes, but when they are tested for drugs, 45 to 60 percent have positive screens and many are for meth, said Doug Brothers, director of the court. Manufacturing seems to be an adult charge.

Ohio No. 3 in meth labs

This chart shows the number of methamphetamine labs reported by various law enforcement agencies.

Indiana.....908
Kentucky.....448
Ohio.....260
Michigan.....254
West Virginia.....51
Pennsylvania.....39

These numbers are for fiscal year 2003 and show the number of labs reported, which may vary from the number of people arrested for the manufacture or assembly of meth.

SOURCE: OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE.

Almost equal numbers of men and women use the drug, the narcotics agent said.

Typically meth users are low-income individuals with children, who "spend less money on living and more money on drugs," said Rick Combs, chief deputy at the sheriff's office.

Users are usually unkempt, with sunken faces and rotting teeth as a result of continuous meth use, Williams said.

Common signs of a meth user



ADDITIONAL STORIES ON PAGES A1, A7

Meth

Continued from A1

ing, bullet-proof vests, masks and testing equipment, said a Clermont County Narcotics Task Force agent, whom the Community Press is not naming for safety reasons,

THE NARCOTICS AGENT AND PROSECUTOR

The narcotics agent makes busting meth users and manufacturers his "crusade," said Clermont County Prosecutor Donald White.

The agent's aggressive approach "put Clermont County on the map," giving it the reputation of having lots of meth labs, White said. However, in reality, Clermont law enforcement simply is addressing the problem, where other counties are not, he said.

The narcotics agent trains officers, county agencies and grocery store employees, teaching them what to look for, said Anthony Brock, Clermont County assistant prosecutor.

"And (the agent) was doing this before anyone else even thought of it," White said.

White said Brock, on the prosecutor's side, is the one making sure those arrested are convicted. State officials, recognizing the work of Brock and the agent, last summer asked them to present workshops at a seminar in Marion for law enforcement and prosecutors from across Ohio.

THE ENFORCEMENT

In 2003, 53 people in Clermont County were indicted for illegal manufacture and six for illegal assembly charges, Williams said. Those arrests happened at the 40 operational meth labs found. Many busts result in

Signs of meth use

People who use crystal meth exhibit certain symptoms. These are some of the most common.

High agitation
Scratching or 'clawing'
Sense of paranoia
Little need to sleep or eat

SOURCE: CLERMONT COUNTY NARCOTICS TASK FORCE

more than one arrest.

"On paper, it looks like a significant problem," White said. "But, ... we are doing something about it."

Williams said if individuals are not trained, they may not know what they are looking at or how to handle it.

Multiple agencies are making meth a county-wide issue, from local police departments, to the sheriff and prosecutor's offices to the Clermont County Health District and Children's Protective Services, said Rick Combs, chief deputy, sheriff's office.

"We have total buy-in here," Combs said. "It is a multi-jurisdictional task force."

"In the larger counties, it is probably a much worse problem," Rodenberg said. "I assume if they went aggressively after it, they would find more. If you look at Franklin County, to assume they have only six (labs) is ridiculous."

Also, other larger counties are not prosecuting for political or economic reasons, Rodenberg said. There are no money forfeitures or large property seizures from meth busts. In cases involving drugs like cocaine, if a car is taken during an arrest, the car can become property of the

police department.

The only thing of value in a meth bust is the structure where the lab is found. But, the toxic chemicals contaminate the building. That means the building can't be seized and sold, Williams said.

THE BUSINESS

While law enforcement officials agree on the characteristics of meth users, they disagree about why they make it.

Combs, Rodenberg, Brock and White said most manufacturers are also users who need to feed their habit. They said the money made from selling extra is reinvested in more ingredients.

Meth users also barter, White said. The manufacturers offer meth to buyers if they steal more ingredients.

Williams and the narcotics agent said while most meth manufacturers originally made the drug for their own use, some are now making larger quantities with the intent of trafficking.

"Just because we don't seize a lot (in a raid) doesn't mean they didn't make a lot," the narcotics agent said. "They have clientele waiting at the door as soon as it is dry. There is no shortage of suppliers who want to buy it."

RemodelKing

From Handyman Repairs to Major Renovations
One Call Does It All

What do you need done today?

- ✓ Fix A Leak
- ✓ Install Lights / Fans
- ✓ Paint A Room
- ✓ Lay Tile
- ✓ Patch A Hole
- ✓ Vinyl Siding
- ✓ Finish Trim
- ✓ Replacement Windows
- ✓ Remodel Kitchen / Bath / Basement

- We insure your down payment
- Guarantee job performance
- Offer Lifetime Labor Warranty

513-648-0200

Call Today or watch our on-line infomercial at
www remodelking.net



as heard on "At Home with Gary Sullivan" radio show on 55KRC

Elite Savings!

Both of our dealerships have qualified for Lexus Elite status, the highest award bestowed by Lexus! We'd like to thank all of our valued customers who made it possible. And to celebrate we offer these special Elite Savings....



The All New 2004 RX 330
\$499 48 MO. LEASE
\$1995 Due At Signing
per month plus tax* No Security Deposit

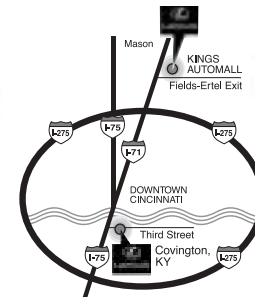


The 2004 Lexus ES 330
\$399 48 MO. LEASE
\$1995 Due At Signing
per month plus tax* No Security Deposit



LEXUS RIVERCENTER
THIRD STREET
COVINGTON, KY
Just Below the I-75 Bridge

(5300)
859-547-LEXUS
Mon. - Thurs. 9 to 8, Fri. & Sat. 9 to 6
www.lexusrivercenter.com



PERFORMANCE LEXUS
IN THE KINGS
AUTOMALL

Fields Ertel and I-71
513-677-0177
Mon. - Thurs. 9 to 8, Fri. & Sat. 9 to 6
www.performancelexus.com

*Plus tax, title and registration. Includes 12,000 total miles with 14¢ per mile for excess. Option to purchase at lease end for pre-determined value. In stock units only. To qualified buyers with Tier 1/700 or higher beacon score. Sale ends January 31, 2004.

Safety a top concern when busting a meth lab

Lights flash from police, fire and emergency medical services vehicles. U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and Special Reaction Team members stand by while the entry team, suited up in personal protective gear that makes them look like astronauts, enter the house.

An episode of "Law and Order?"

No, this is the reality of a Clermont County meth lab raid.

The message from the county's law enforcement community is: Methamphetamine and meth labs could be on your street, and the people making the drug could be your neighbors.

The scenario below is not typical of all busts, said Bill Williams, director with the Clermont County Narcotics Task Force. It describes the various components of a bust, not all of which are needed at every raid.

"No two raids are alike," Williams said.

It starts with a complaint to the sheriff's office. This could be from a neighbor or other witness or from a local law enforcement agency, Williams said.

"We talk with the boss (Sheriff A.J. "Tim" Rodenburg)

and then talk with the witness," Williams said. "We have to (investigate and) build a case."

Williams said task force members have to develop enough probable cause to apply for a search warrant of the premises. From there, a plan is developed to execute the warrant.

"Once the probable cause is established, we start to coordinate the effort," Williams said. In gathering information, the team needs as much information as they can gather. What is the floor plan? Does the perpetrator have guard dogs? Firearms? A criminal history? How many people are inside? Are there children? What are the potential hazards?

"At the same time information is being gathered, we coordinate with the local fire and (emergency medical services) departments," Williams said. But, the information is shared only with the person with decision-making authority.

Local police officers and fire department personnel will be

situated at the scene, but will not have access to cell or pay phones, Williams said. Any call could tip off the people inside the house.

Final issues are then determined: Do they have adequate resources? Who is part of the assessment team?

If they know children are on the premises, Child Protective Services is alerted and briefed to the location but information is kept minimal and the agency representative is kept a safe distance away.

The time arrives.

All parties arrive at the scene. First inside is the entry team in their safety gear. There are different levels of bio-hazardous suits, depending on the risk anticipated, Williams said. The overall look is astronaut-like, but the safety of the entry team is

STORIES REPORTED AND WRITTEN BY BRANDI BROWN, GINA DIMARIO AND MOLLY WILLIAMSON EDITED BY THERESA L. HERRON.

paramount.

Williams said meth manufacturers are not "rocket scientists."

"Everything is not set out nice and neat on a table," Williams said. "The stuff could be all over the house."

The danger is in both the manufacturing and by-products, Williams said. They can both be highly volatile. "They don't care about the danger they pose to family members, neighbors, citizens."

The entry team removes all people from the house and does an initial assessment of the scene. "We have to process the scene. We photograph the scene. We determine what needs to go in a safety zone," Williams said.

The safety zone is an area outside roped off for volatile materials, he said. Another area is set up for non-volatile materials that will go into the evidence property room. These are items like firearms, money and (finished) drugs.

If animals are found, the team calls animal control.

In the meantime, it must be determined if the suspect has to be decontaminated, Williams said. He said it's not unusual for material spills, on the floor, table and clothing of the "cook." Dangerous residues must be removed from the people inside.

Then, if the suspect is "reasonably coherent," he is asked for a "plausible explanation," Williams said. At that point, if there is probable cause, the suspect is taken into custody and charged.

But, the job still isn't finished.

Meth lab locations are contaminated, Williams said. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency is given

By any other name

Methamphetamine goes by many names on the street
tweak go-fast
meth crystal
ice crank
glass chalk

advance notice of the raid and must send in a hazardous materials team for clean-up.

"We give them a description of the materials found and the volume," Williams said.

Before the scene is vacated, it is sealed and notices are posted to keep away because this was a clandestine meth lab.

"Law and Order" can complete this scenario in the first 30 minutes of the program, but Williams said from the time of arrival at the scene to final exit of all law enforcement agencies involved, the task can take three to 12 hours.

Then - the paperwork, and the agents let the judicial system take over before the next bust.



ADDITIONAL STORIES ON PAGES A1, A3

Meth recipe uses regular household items in its brew

There are no illegal border crossings, no smuggling, no fancy drug lord connections to make meth readily available to the masses.

The ingredients for methamphetamine can be purchased at the corner grocery store. Anything with ephedrine, which is used in over the counter medicines for colds, hay fever and allergies, is used in meth production.

Starter fluid or aerosol cans with holes punched in the bottom are red flags for meth activity, said Anthony Brock, Clermont County assistant prosecutor. ORock salt, paint thinner and several other household products also go into the mix.

Meth includes anhydrous ammonia, which seeks water when released, said a Clermont County Narcotics Task Force agent, whom the Community Press is not naming for safety reasons. When a team goes in to clean up a lab, members must wear hazardous material suits because the ammonia gas seeps into their eyes, nose and mouth seeking the moisture.

"They are all normal things," but not in the large quantities needed to make meth, Brock said. "It would be hard (to prosecute someone) with one box (of Sudafed), but with 10 boxes, you have a lot stronger case."

Merchants know if someone is buying or stealing large quantities of Sudafed, they should call local law enforcement, said

"It is nothing but a bomb. If that ignites, oh my God."
A Clermont County Narcotics Task Force agent.

Donald White, Clermont County prosecutor. Police can often stop the consumer in the parking lot and find in their car other items that together provide a strong case for illegal assembly charges.

It is important to realize the mentality of manufacturers, said Bill Williams, Clermont County Narcotics Task Force director. People with "extremely low IQs can master" manufacturing.



Some of the ephedrine-based allergy medications available in stores all over the country. Ephedrine is used to make methamphetamines.

Even though making meth requires somewhat involved processes, the manufacturers learn because "the motivation is there."

Plus, many of these people do not have jobs, so they have all day to "sit around and think" of how to do these things, the narcotics agent said. "This is their job."

Also, they usually don't give a second thought to the waste products, Williams said.

For every pound of meth, six pounds of waste are made, all of which are considered hazardous by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, said Rick Combs, chief deputy, Clermont County Sheriff's Office. They bury it in the ground, throw it in a ditch or their bathroom drain.

Or they will just stack up jars of ether and sludge in their garage, the narcotics agent said. "It is nothing but a bomb. If that ignites, oh my God."

"They don't care about the danger posed to their family, neighbors or citizens of the county," Williams said. "It's all toxic."

Clermont County Health District employees are learning how to deal with the hazards, said Janet Rickabaugh, health commissioner.

The environmental effects of meth are unknown, but health district workers are learning about how to clean homes and about possible land contamination issues when byproducts are buried or discarded in waterways, Rickabaugh said.



GINA DIMARIO/STAFF

Chief Deputy Rick Combs of the Clermont County sheriff's office talks about locations and statistics of meth lab busts in the county in 2003.

Charges vary, convictions steady

As Clermont County law enforcement agencies get more tips, busts of illegal methamphetamine labs and arrests of users and manufacturers are steadily increasing.

Of the people indicted in 2003 on felony charges of illegal manufacture and illegal assembly, 100 percent were convicted in the cases finalized so far. Several cases from last year are pending, said Anthony Brock, the Clermont County assistant prosecutor who handles most of these cases.

That conviction rate is up from 85 percent in 2001, said Donald White, Clermont County prosecutor.

For the police to be successful in finding meth labs, they need community cooperation, said Rick Combs, chief deputy at the sheriff's office.

"That is how we get our information," Combs said. "There are 170,000 people in this county and they see a lot more than we do."

As trends grow, more people are calling the drug hotline, 625-2806, Combs said. People also can visit www.clermontsheriff.org and click on the "Submit a Crime Tip."

"One lady called in and said, 'My sister-in-law is cooking meth,'" Combs said.

A telltale sign for neighbors is a "really strong" chemical smell like ether or sulfuric acid, Brock said.

It is important to report anything suspicious because meth labs could blow up and take down neighbors' homes, Combs said.

Most people are charged with illegal manufacture or illegal assembly, manufacturing being the more serious charge, carrying a maximum of eight years in prison with a minimum requirement of two years, Brock said.

To be charged with illegal

manufacture, the police do not need to see anything "bubbling or steaming," Brock said. The person simply must be engaged in the process like setting up the manufacturing lab.

Clermont County Common Pleas Judge Robert Ringland said he sentences offenders to a

wants all deals for meth-related crimes to go through him. When he first took office as prosecutor, he made it clear he would give no deals for anyone convicted of a rock-cocaine charge because he didn't "want the problem to develop here." He said he feels the same way about meth.

The prosecution of meth labs in the county has "changed the population" of those in probation, said Joe Ellison, chief probation officer for Clermont County Municipal Court. Probation officers have more training to prepare them for home visits.

"We are seeing more positive indicators (for meth)," Ellison said. "We have not seen a huge impact, but it is another dangerous issue we need to deal with."

Throughout the last 10 years, Clermont has seen an increase in "harder" drugs, he said. Before then, most were people prosecuted for alcohol or marijuana abuse, but more people now are using heroin, cocaine and prescription drugs like OxyContin.

Marijuana and alcohol will always be the two most heavily used drugs in Clermont because they are the most socially accepted and readily available, said David Levine, Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime research and data case manager supervisor. TASC is a case management program for offenders on probation.

Dee Hargitt, TASC director, said more and more meth users are referred to the program. Depending on the severity of the offender's addiction, the TASC staff refers the offenders to either treatment from the Clermont Recovery Center or educational classes that deal with the emotional, health and legal consequences of the offender's behavior.

By the numbers

| 2003 | |
|---|----|
| Meth labs: 40 | |
| Arrested for ... | |
| - Illegal manufacture | 50 |
| - Conspiracy to manufacture | 1 |
| - Illegal assembly of chemicals | 5 |
| Children referred to Child Protective Services due to meth lab investigations | 43 |
| 2002 | |
| Meth labs: 28 | |
| Arrested for ... | |
| - Illegal manufacture | 31 |
| - Conspiracy to manufacture | 18 |
| 2001 | |
| Meth Labs: 24 | |
| Arrested for ... | |
| - Illegal manufacture | 37 |
| - Conspiracy to manufacture | 9 |

Children often found at lab sites

Anger and violence usually are associated with acts of child abuse, but for children in homes with methamphetamines, abuse takes a different form. They can be forced to help manufacture the drug, which means they can ingest toxic chemicals.

One teenager described everything she did in the manufacturing process, said Ann Arbaugh, Clermont County Children's Services deputy director. The teen told case-workers "how the battery acid felt on her hands" and about the smell and the way it burned her nose.

Jill Gomez, vice president of Clermont Recovery Center, said children of meth users and manufacturers are the real victims.

"When (the narcotics unit) goes in to clean up the labs, they wear hazardous material suits, but those kids are living and breathing that every day without a suit," Gomez said.

"They are probably developmentally stunted," she said. "Also, if the parents are high, they forget to feed their kids. The effect on the kids is really

"When (the narcotics unit) goes in to clean up the labs, they wear hazardous material suits, but those kids are living and breathing that every day without a suit."

Jill Gomez
Clermont Recovery Center

sad. They are the ones affected the most."

Children were found in almost every Clermont lab, said Clermont County Sheriff A.J. "Tim" Rodenburg.

While finding children in a meth lab does not mean an automatic child endangerment charge, agents take the situation "very seriously," said a Clermont County Narcotics Task Force agent, whom the Community Press is not naming for safety reasons.

Though no two busts are alike, all of them are "bad," the narcotics agent said. The worst case of child endangerment he can remember was a bust in Franklin Township, where eight children were taken from the home.

Between Jan. 1 and Dec. 30,

2003, Clermont County law enforcement agencies took 43 children from homes where meth was found.

This burden is significant for the Clermont County Children's Services, Arbaugh said. Children's Services has a total of 280 children in their care.

Children's Services reunites children with parents within one year if possible, but the limited time frame is difficult for meth users, Arbaugh said. The difficulty arises because kicking a meth or any drug addiction without relapse in one year is close to impossible.

And, meth is a difficult habit to break. "Other addictions are more treatable and that's a huge problem," said Arbaugh.