

Police seek residents' help in drug battle

By JOE GORMAN Tribune Chronicle

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WARREN - For more operations like Wednesday's simultaneous raids of five houses in Warren, residents of those neighborhoods need to help out, says Lt. Jeff Orr of the Trumbull Ashtabula Group drug task force.

At one of the homes raided, officers asked neighbors who were outside if they had seen any criminal activity around. Their answer was sobering, Orr said.

"They said, 'We don't talk to the police' and went inside," Orr said.

Four homes on the northwest and southwest sides of the city, as well as one on Elm Road N.E., were hit by more than 100 officers from 13 agencies early Wednesday morning. Police made 15 arrests.

Orr said TAG began looking into the homes, where they say heroin was dealt, about two to three weeks ago after they were asked to do so by the Warren Police Department. Investigators found a Detroit connection as they were working the case, and Orr said the operation in at least two of the homes was run by the same person.

Past practice indicates that once a group of dealers are gone, another group from Detroit will come in and try and take their place, Orr said. The only way to combat that from a law enforcement point of view is to put pressure on them, and for that, they need the help of residents who see criminal activity going on in their neighborhoods, he said.

"It's very important for people to call us whenever there's some kind of strange behavior," Orr said.

Outside dealers come to the Mahoning Valley because it is a smaller market, which allows them to charge more for their product than they could get in Detroit.

"They have been here for awhile," Orr said. "They can make more money here than in Detroit."

Orr said that he thinks in terms of personnel Wednesday's raid is one of the largest in the county, but he said he's been involved in operations in the past where more drugs and money were seized.

According to a TAG press release Wednesday, officers seized 600 bindles of heroin worth \$15,000 as well as five firearms, 100 pills and a small amount of marijuana.