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Tuesday, June 10, 2008

Operation Falcon claws suspects

Nationwide sweep rounds up 221 throughout Central Mass.

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WORCESTER— A pile of manila folders sits in a box. Each folder has a person's name on the front. Each has a photograph.

They are of varying race, gender and social background, but they all have something in common: an arrest warrant.

Authorities from more than two dozen police agencies across Central Massachusetts, working with federal and state organizations, headed out at dawn last week to hunt down the people whose names found their way onto the folders.

The sweep was part of the larger Operation Falcon 2008, a nationwide effort headed by the U.S. Marshals Service.

Some of the people knew they would eventually be found. Others didn't plan on being taken in easy and tried to escape, only to be corralled by the team of law enforcement officials nearby.

With more than 1,000 folders — roughly 550 were for people last known to be in Worcester — the law enforcement officials started the task of tracking people down on June 2.

Teams were dispatched in the city and in various communities throughout the region.

The weeklong sting netted 221 people, including 20 known gang members and 70 people deemed violent offenders. Operation Falcon targeted violent criminals and gang members. Sex offenders were a focus of a previous operation, one that netted in 172 arrests in the area.



Worcester police Officer Michael Higgins talks on the radio as he and other officers prepare to enter an apartment at Great Brook Valley. (T&G Staff/CHRISTINE PETERSON)

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In the latest roundup, officers encountered a range of people and range of circumstances. Some law enforcement teams arrived at homes that turned out to be abandoned.

Some of the addresses were old; the person had moved.

One team hit the streets of Worcester about 6:30 a.m. on the first day. Within moments, the first arrest was in the book, on Bolton Street.

Daniel Hayes, 24, of 23 Bolton St., Worcester, came to the front door weary-eyed. There in front of him stood a group of authorities ready to serve him with an outstanding warrant for marijuana distribution.

"We could see he just woke up," said Worcester Officer Samuel Rivera, a detective who is assigned to the New England U.S. Marshals High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Fugitive Task Force — made up of deputy marshals, and state and Worcester police.

"We woke up a lot of people that week," he said.

Mr. Hayes was cooperative as Officer Rivera talked with him.

"I sat him down and said, 'Do you have anything in the house we need to know about?'" the detective said. "He told us about the marijuana and the gun."

The law enforcement officials eventually got a search warrant to check the home, at the end of a dead-end street with a view of the city and Holy Name High School nearby.

Authorities said they found two handguns, a magazine for a rifle, 60 grams of cocaine, brass knuckles, three swords and a large knife in the home.

There was also a small amount of marijuana and some marijuana plants that were just starting to grow.

"I thought we might find some marijuana," the detective said. "The cocaine find was surprising."

Mr. Hayes was charged in Central District Court with possession of a large capacity firearm feeding device, three counts of possession of a firearm without a Firearm ID Card, possession of a firearm with a defaced serial number in a felony, possession of cocaine with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, trafficking in cocaine, and drug violation near a school or park.

There were nine sex offenders arrested in the sweep. Deputy Lewis said 12 guns were seized, as well as 266 grams of powder cocaine, 20 grams of crack cocaine, more than 4-1/2pounds of marijuana and just under \$7,000 in cash.

The warrants were for different offenses, ranging from assaults to drug violations and weapons charges.

One month of preparation goes into getting the folders ready, and then the hunt begins.

A team headed by Deputy Marshal Mark S. Lewis fanned out to different areas of Worcester.

On June 3, one team went to 25 Converse St. — a billing location for UMass Memorial Health Care. The man wanted there was Robert DiCredico, sought for rape, incident assault and battery on a person 14 or over and kidnapping, all stemming from an earlier case in Tewksbury.

"State police developed information he was working in Worcester and contacted a team of investigators assigned to Operation Falcon," Deputy Lewis said. "State police developed the lead, and when he contacted the investigators, they weren't far from the location."

The building was surrounded, and Mr. DiCredico was taken into custody. Later, Mark Shelton, a spokesman for UMass, said Mr. DiCredico is on personal leave.

Other arrests of interest:

- In Worcester, a team was looking for Joseph C. Gedman III, 22, last known to be living at 77 Elm St., Apt. 3, in Millbury. On June 4, authorities tracked him to a May Street apartment.

Wanted for attempted murder and assault and battery, Mr. Gedman allegedly first tried to jump out a

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first-floor window covered by bars.

“When we surrounded the residence, he and a friend tried to jump out the first-floor window,” Deputy Lewis said. “They started to go out and went back in when they saw us all outside.”

- On June 4 in Southbridge, the Operation Falcon team there was looking for Prejue Burke, 40. He was found in a third-floor apartment at 52 Main St.

“Authorities entered, and inside they saw narcotics and jewelry in plain site,” the deputy marshal said. “After further investigation the authorities found the jewelry (more than \$1,800 worth) was stolen.”

Also allegedly seized were 72 grams of powder cocaine and 20 grams of crack cocaine.

- On June 6 in Hudson, team members were looking for Steven Gomes, 28, who was last known to be living in Spencer.

They first looked for him in Brookfield, then tracked him to Hudson. He was wanted on a larceny charge from last year.

Mr. Gomes was pulled over in Hudson for an alleged motor vehicle violation. He allegedly had a .22-caliber rifle under the driver’s seat.

After a search of his home, authorities reportedly found four other weapons.



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