

Drug bust a record here

More than 70 suspects arrested for steroids, other substances

BY DON MUNSCH
dmunsch@fbherald.com

A drug sting nearly three years in the making resulted in the arrests of more than 70 people involved in the distribution of steroids and other substances, local law enforcement and federal officials said Wednesday afternoon at a press conference at the Fort Bend County Fairgrounds.

Tim Johnson, U.S. Attorney representing the Southern District of Texas, said a man who ran a business in Sugar Land was the primary individual at the center of the investigation. Fort Bend County Sheriff Milton Wright said the sting was the most significant operation initiated and enforced by the Fort Bend County Narcotics Task Force and was the largest drug enforcement operation successfully executed in Fort Bend County history.

Suspects in the sting were processed at the fairgrounds.

"At this date in time, we have served 49 state warrants or indictments, (and) we have served 17 federal indictments and they are in custody," Wright said. "There are still some more out. We expect this number to rise before the day is over. I might also mention the investigation in this matter is not completed."

The sheriff's office said in a press release provided at the news conference that 73 people had been arrested, and that 51 defendants had been indicted by the Fort Bend County District Attorney's Office and 22 defendants had been indicted by the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Southern District of Texas. People affili-



STAFF PHOTO BY RUSSELL AUTREY

Several law enforcement agencies participated in a massive drug sting Wednesday as officers served almost 50 warrants and arrested more than 70 suspects. Suspects were taken to the Fort Bend County Fairgrounds for processing.

ated with the operation were arrested Wednesday in Louisiana, California, Georgia and Indiana.

The Operaton "Farmacia de Juicy Phruit" probe, initiated by the Fort Bend County Narcotics Task Force (a Houston High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Enforcement Team and Drug Enforcement Administration-

Houston field office effort), started in August 2006 and people identified in the investigation were part of an international drug trafficking organization involved in the distribution of "hundreds of thousands of dosage units of anabolic steroids, human growth hormones, MDMA (ecstasy) and controlled pharmaceutical sub-

stances to include anabolic steroids, HGH, Hydrocodone, Xanax and Viagra." Several other agencies, who had representatives at the press briefing, assisted in the probe.

Wright said that during the serving of one of the warrants to a de-

SEE STING, PAGE 5A

STING: Area agencies arrest more than 70

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

defendant's home, 50 marijuana plants were found and confiscated.

The lead defendant in the case is Charles Falkenhagen, who owned and operated Fitness Consultants in Sugar Land, Johnson said. Falkenhagen used Fitness Consultants to unlawfully import HGH from a Chinese company.

"This was and is a loosely knit organization," Wright said. "They have no formal organizational parts. It's one of those things where they've got their friends on speed dial, and if they need a certain product, they knew who to call and so forth."

Wright said he appreciated the work of the DEA on the sting and he thanked agencies for their helping round up suspects Wednesday morning.

District Attorney John Healey said his office looks forward

to prosecuting those cases in Fort Bend County "with great anticipation."

"This effort, combined effort, of law enforcement agencies, underscores how important we take this whole issue of (distribution) of pharmaceuticals and proliferation of anabolic steroids," said Zoran B. Yankovich, special agent-in-charge from the DEA office in Houston. The local investigation that started here grew into a national and international probe, with assistance from the Internal Revenue Service, Food and Drug Administration and other agencies, Yankovich said.

Johnson said the county is a "safer place today" as an excess of 50-plus drug dealers were taken off the street. He said a sealed indictment was returned on April 30 accusing 22 people of 46 separate counts, including smuggling of HGH, money laundering and conspir-

acy and possession with intent to distribute ecstasy, among many charges. Falkenhagen is named in "practically all" of those 46 counts, Johnson said.

Substances ranged from steroids to painkillers in sting

BY DON MUNSCH

dmunsch@bherald.com

The drugs and substances at the center of the probe circulated among physical fitness trainers in gyms around Fort Bend and Harris counties, said Fort Bend County Sheriff Milton Wright. The trainers distributed the drugs at the gym, while others distributed them after they were contacted by another buyer.

"Two people have been charged

with everything from manufacture to sell, deliver and possession," Wright said, adding that "a lot of these steroids were manufactured in Fort Bend County in clandestine labs."

During the investigation, authorities discovered substances and chemicals being imported, illegally, from foreign countries.

No connection has been made to any professional athletes, namely baseball players, buying steroids from suspects, said Zoran B. Yankovich,

Special Agent-in-Charge from the Drug Enforcement Administration office in Houston. The targeted buyers were 19 years and older, Wright said. Some of the people arrested for possession were trainees of trainers, he said. Some members of pain clinics were arrested, Yankovich said.

Painkillers and male-enhancement medications, incidentally, are sought by steroid users because of how they counteract the effects of steroids, Wright said.

"We're clearly sending a message to our communities that prescription drug abuse and steroid abuse is (high) on our radar and it's a dangerous, illegal practice," Yankovich said.

He said he hopes people in the community that steroid use does not open doors to athletic success, but is actually a deterrent. He said the drug dealers arrested Wednesday are no different from "traditional drug dealers" who peddle cocaine, meth or heroin.