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Drug war continues on two fronts

Editor's note: This is the last in a series on The Changing in Faces of Addiction, a daylong workshop presented by ARVAC Inc., hosted at the River Valley Addiction Center (Freed on House) in Russellville.

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They are two men among thousands involved for many hours and many days in the war against drugs, alcohol and those who choose to abuse them.

One fights on the front lines with his best friend. The other represents the war waged in courts of law, in front of judges and juries.

Arkansas State Police Trooper Kyle Drown; his drug dog, Rudy, and Jack Thorp of the

Fifth Judicial District Prosecuting Attorney's Office were responsible last year for the seizure of millions of dollars in illegal narcotics and substances, as well as putting several persons behind bars for their acts or attempting to help them change their ways.

They informed the audience during The Changing Faces of Addiction that sometimes you've simply got to get nasty to deal with drugs.

"Last year, Rudy and I seized approximately \$10 million in drugs," said Drown, a trooper since 1996. "It is combined effort between area law enforcement. We've already seized more than \$4 million this year, so we're ahead of the game."

"A lot of people have the impression that DWI (driving while intoxicated) is only by alcohol, but if you're impaired by illegal drugs or narcotics, you can also be charged with DWI."

"The two controlled substances we deal with the most are methamphetamine and marijuana," Thorp explained.

"Meth is an epidemic, but we are geared to stop it. My main focus is drugs, and I really like that. I don't think we're losing the war on drugs, but maybe I think that because I've only been doing this for three years."

During Drown's discussion of samples of illegal drugs and narcotics on two bulletin board-like displays, he stated one

ounce of cocaine has a street value of \$1,600, a type of methamphetamine called "dirty meth" most comes out of California, but comes cleaner from other states including Arkansas, and discussed various busts he had worked during his tenure as a drug interdiction officer with Rudy.

"We discovered a Chevrolet Suburban had a 10-gallon gas tank inside the regular vehicle's tank," the trooper pointed out. "We once stopped a Plymouth Neon in Johnson County that supposedly had presents in its trunk to take to the driver's grandmother, although the occupants of the vehicle didn't know where their grandmother lived. Rudy alerted to the trunk,

and we found several pounds of cocaine under presents that were marked 'Mom.'"

Drown put his dog through the motions, hiding a marijuana-scented sock under a projector. The dog, who is quite hyperactive whenever or whatever the situation, according to Drown, went to work in seconds after the trooper gave the command.

"Even if you drive across the country and have rehearsed and rehearsed your story, you will not know every question we are going to ask," Drown added.

"Plus, you will not be very comfortable or cool sitting on a bunch of dope. Other things we

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look for include if the tires on a vehicle are worth more than the vehicle itself. If it can be put in a vehicle, they will find ways to put drugs in."

Thorp explained the primary purpose of the prosecutor's office is not to put all substance abuse off enders in jail. Prosecutor David Gibbons and his staff created the River Valley Turnaround Program, in which someone charged with simple possession is put on probation for five years and is required to seek counseling to beat the addiction they have. If they do everything they're supposed to do and meet their part of the commitment, the prosecutor's office will reduce the charges in five years.

"The other aspect of our work is the drug dealers," Thorp noted. "I've been to a lot of schools, and have paid particular attention to the people I go up against. The main crime we have in this area are theft crimes. On the other hand, when we arrest persons for something else, they are the same ones we arrest for thefts or drugs. Eighty percent of all crimes are related to alcohol or drug abuse." According to Thorp, one-fourth of a gram of methamphetamine has a street value of \$25; one gram, \$100; and more than 3.5 grams, what is known as an "eight-ball," is worth \$250.

"The punishment for possession of a controlled substance, methamphetamine, with intent to deliver - if someone is caught

with an eight-ball, for example is 10 to 40 years or life in prison," said Thorp. "Possession of one ounce of marijuana with intent to deliver can get you 3 to 10 years, which is a Class C felony. First offense possession of marijuana is a misdemeanor. Second offense can get you up to six years in jail.

"Since Interstate 40 is a major drug trafficking highway, that excites me when we hit people for \$10 million in illegal drugs, property or money."

Clandestine work

The war on drugs involves working with individuals who commit smaller crimes and working with them to catch the bigger fish, according to Thorp. He pointed out some people have a problem with giving persons the opportunity to get into less trouble by becoming confidential informants, but it is one of the ways to catch drug dealers.

"We had a pregnant woman buy from her husband in the past two years," Thorp said. "Meth comes from either local labs, or the super meth labs in Mexico or California. Every-thing you need to make meth can be purchased at retail or hardware stores. But meth labs are extremely dangerous, and people who make meth are extremely dangerous, because they are extremely paranoid."

Thorp stated that the controlled substance ecstasy (MDA) has become popular with students as they become more available in a pill form to kids at what are called "rave" parties. The son of a law enforcement officer in Arkansas died from ecstasy.

Also, a new derivative of cocaine is cut and laced with heroin, according to Thorp. The first weekend the substance hit Houston's streets, 14 people were killed, he said.

"It hasn't gotten here yet, but we're looking into it and will be ready for it when it gets here," Thorp said.

Yet another "designer drug," known as GHB, appears as a yellowish liquid and has been used to mix in people's drinks and knock them out at rave parties. Thorp called GHB one form of the "date rape" drug.

Thorp added they key to the war on drugs in the Fifth Judicial District, which includes Pope, Johnson and Franklin counties, is information. He pointed out the telephone number of the district's Drug Task Force, 968-6258, is the best way the war on drugs can be waged.

"We are very, very interested in any information we can get," said Thorp. "While we see quite a bit of marijuana, we have to prioritize. Meth is a big problem."