

Police arrest dozens in busts targeting heroin

By Gal Tziperman Lotan

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Police have arrested more than two dozen people over the past few days in separate drug busts in the Merrimack Valley and Western Massachusetts following an increase in heroin overdoses.

In a coordinated sweep targeting heroin dealers, police officials from Lawrence, Methuen, Andover, Haverhill, and Salem, N.H., arrested 25 people on drug charges, a State Police spokesman said.

Two more people were arrested on heroin possession charges in Greenfield, and two young children — a 4-year-old and an 8-year-old — were taken away from the apartment where they lived.

At least four people have died of heroin overdoses in Massachusetts this year, though state officials are still compiling overdose statistics and verified numbers were not available.

In addition to the 25 people arrested in the Merrimack Valley, police officials issued court summonses for others, State Police spokesman David Procopio said.

The operation targeted street-level heroin deals in Lawrence, he said.

Exact names and charges for the people arrested were not available Saturday through Procopio or the Lawrence Police Department, which led the operation.

On Friday, officers from Greenfield, the Northwestern District Attorney's Anti-Crime Task Force, and State Police served a search warrant at an apartment at 6 Oak Courts in Greenfield, Procopio said.

Caitlyn Shepard and Steven Sochocki, both 24, were arrested around 9 p.m. Friday, according to a statement from Greenfield Police.

Shepard and Sochocki were charged with possession of a Class A controlled substance and a Class E controlled substance.

Another woman will be charged at a later date with possession of a Class A drug, police said.

Shepard and Sochocki were released on bail from police department holding cells Friday at midnight, according to Detective Lieutenant Dan McCarthy. He did not have information on the date of their arraignment.

During a search of the apartment, officers found "a few bags of heroin" and empty packets of heroin. There were up to seven different brand stamps on the bags, police said.

The couple's two young children were in the apartment at the time, Procopio said, adding that the children had not eaten all day.

Police officials brought the children food and subsequently handed them over to the Department of Children and Families.

Lawrence Police Chief James X. Fitzpatrick told [the Globe last week](#) that his department has counted about 10 nonfatal overdoses since the start of the year.

They began tracking the number after a recent statewide spike in overdoses caught their attention.

Police in Taunton and Salisbury have also noted an increase in heroin overdoses.

Police officials are not sure why the number of overdoses and deaths in the region has been rising. It could be an especially potent strain of the drug, a more toxic cutting agent like Fentanyl, or people using a few drugs simultaneously, Procopio said last week. It could also be some combination of the three, he said.

Anti-drug task force members raid Orange home, arrest 2 on heroin charges; DA cites 'addiction crisis' in 7 suspected recent overdoses



By [George Graham, The Republican](#)

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on January 24, 2014

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ORANGE – Members of the Northwestern District Attorney's Anti-Crime Force raided a Maynard Street home Thursday, arresting a man and woman on heroin charges, while Northwestern District Attorney David Sullivan called addiction to the drug a "crisis" in Hampshire and Franklin counties that may have claimed seven lives in the past month.

According to a release issued by Mary Carey, spokeswoman for the district attorney's office, task force members conducting surveillance on 15 Maynard St. saw one of the suspects, David Farrow, 58, leave the home and drive to Fitchburg. The city is a known source of heroin for the Orange area, Carey wrote.

Investigators saw Farrow get out of his vehicle in Fitchburg, return to it and drive back to his Orange home. Police then approached Farrow, and he allegedly admitted that he had 15 grams of heroin in his vest.

Police then entered the residence to execute the search warrant and found Winifred Farrow, 52, inside. She admitted that she was waiting for David Farrow to bring back the heroin and that she intend to cut, package and sell it.

Members of the task force estimated that the three grams would translate to 90 bags of heroin once cut and repackaged for resale in the Orange area.

Both suspects are slated to be arraigned in Orange District Court Friday morning.

“We will not stop pursuing those who are intentionally poisoning our communities with this extremely dangerous drug,” Chief Trial Counsel Jeremy Bucci said. “With the recent spate of suspected opiate related overdose deaths, the Northwestern District Attorney’s Office is grateful for the tireless efforts of the Anti-Crime Task Force to address the supply side of this problem. We still desperately need resources to combat the demand side of this crisis as well.”

District Attorney Sullivan said his state police detective unit and local police have investigated 7 suspected opioid overdose deaths in Hampshire and Franklin counties in the past month. Sullivan said his office is awaiting official cause-of-death rulings from the state Office of the Medical Examiner, which will issue autopsy and toxicology reports.

"These deaths highlight the desperate need for increased detoxification, treatment, and recovery programs in western Massachusetts," Sullivan said.

While law enforcement officials in Hampden County Friday said they are unable to point to any recent deaths as suspected heroin overdoses, they said earlier that Interstate 91 is a corridor for heroin being shipped north into Western Massachusetts and buyers traveling south from Vermont and New Hampshire.

Earlier this month, state police stopped a driver on Interstate 91 in Hatfield and seized more 1,200 bags of heroin – much of it labeled "Obama Care." Shortly after that a broken headlight and taillight led to a state trooper's arrest of a man and two women from Vermont on heroin charges on Hampden Street in Holyoke.

Earlier this month, Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin warned of a [**“full-blown heroin crisis”**](#) in his state.

"It is a crisis bubbling just beneath the surface that may be invisible to many but is already highly visible to law enforcement, medical personnel, social service and addiction treatment providers and too many Vermont families," Shumlin said.

Shumlin said Vermont's Drug Task Force estimates that more than \$2 million worth of heroin and other opiates are being trafficked into Vermont each week.

Third crack arrest this year for Greenfield woman



TARA SHIPPEE

By CHRIS CURTIS Recorder Staff

GREENFIELD — A local woman on probation for drug convictions is in jail again, charged Thursday with drug crimes for the third time in four months.

Tara N. Shippee, 39, of 1 Bouker St., is charged with possession of cocaine with intent to distribute, as a subsequent offense. She pleaded innocent at her arraignment.

The new charge follows the execution of a third search warrant for the residence by Greenfield Police and the Northwestern District Attorney's Anti-Crime Task Force.

Police searched the home at 6:41 a.m. Thursday and recovered three rocks of a substance they believe is crack cocaine, according to the police report and a release from the DA's office.

Shippee pleaded guilty to earlier felony charges of possession of crack cocaine with intent to distribute following the July 2 and May 16 searches, according to the DA's office, and was on probation for those convictions at the time of her latest arrest.

Greenfield District Court Judge William F. Mazanec III ordered Shippee held at the Franklin County House of Correction in lieu of \$15,000 cash bail or \$150,000 surety, pending her next court date Dec. 16, and held without bail on her alleged probation violation.

The task force allegedly found 37 individually packaged rocks of crack valued at \$100 apiece in Shippee's home in May, and four crack rocks concealed outside a sliding glass door in July.

"We view the criminal activity of repeat offenders as particularly egregious," Northwestern DA's Chief Trial Counsel Jeremy Bucci, who is prosecuting the case, said in a release. "We bring to bear the full weight of our prosecutorial efforts when people flaunt the conditional liberty courts have previously granted them."

The residence has featured in other drug cases.

Police charged four area men with possession of prescription painkillers without a prescription following a visit to 1 Bouker St. in July. Similar charges followed that month after police questioned two men leaving the residence, charging one with possession of a prescription opiate painkiller and the prescription amphetamine Adderall, and the other with distribution of the painkillers.

2 local men arrested on drug charges after short pursuit

ATHOL -- Two local men were arrested on multiple drug charges following a traffic stop on School Street on Wednesday afternoon.

Prior to the two being arrested, a short foot pursuit ensued following the traffic stop at 4:39, with back-up being requested.

Josue Bermudez, 31, of 479 School St., was taken into custody on a warrant and charges of trafficking in a Class A substance (heroin 36 to 100 grams), trafficking in a Class B substance (cocaine 100 to 200 grams), assault and battery on a police officer, resisting arrest, and conspiracy to violate the controlled substance act.

Gary D. Fields, 21, of 26 Lee St., is charged with carrying a dangerous weapon (spring knife), trafficking in a Class A substance (heroin 36 to 100 grams), trafficking in a Class B substance (cocaine 100 to 200 grams), and conspiracy to violate the controlled substance act.

The arrests were the result of an ongoing two-month investigation by the Northwestern District Attorney's Anti-Crime Task Force, Massachusetts State Parole, the Athol Police Department and the Massachusetts State Police.

Approximately 63 grams of heroin and 113 grams of cocaine were seized along with \$2,000 in cash. The street value of the drugs seized is approximately \$40,000.

Bermudez was held on \$250,000 cash bail and Fields was held on \$50,000 cash bail. Both were due to be arraigned in Orange District Court today, with Superior Court Grand Jury indictments expected to follow in the coming weeks.



JOSUE BERMUDEZ



GARY D. FIELDS

Suspected ODs led police to cocaine trafficking bust

By REBECCA EVERETT @GazetteRebecca



This house at 175 Pleasant St. in Easthampton has drawn police attention over the last year because of two suspicious deaths there.

EASTHAMPTON — City police have been concerned for months about the duplex at 175 Pleasant St. where there have been two suspected overdose deaths since January. That suspicion prompted an investigation that led last week to the arrest of Marcella Severance, 54, who lived there, on a drug trafficking charge, along with neighbor Heather A. Martinez, 38, of 7 Berkley St., who was arrested on drug possession charges.

While both police and neighbors were familiar with the house because of disturbances there, according to Police Chief Bruce W. McMahon, it took months of work for investigators to build a drug trafficking case against Severance, who pleaded not guilty to the charges Monday in Northampton District Court.

The reported overdoses brought police right into the house in January and again a few months ago, but they had to get enough evidence to secure a search warrant to look in the home for drugs before they could make any arrests, McMahon said.

“We take the information we get and run with it. Sometimes it pans out, like this, and we can get a search warrant and make an arrest, and sometimes it doesn’t,” McMahon said. He said police are constantly investigating tips and leads about possible drug operations in the city, though they don’t always develop into an arrest.

“I don’t think this was an isolated thing,” he said of any alleged drug selling. “There are drugs here, there are drugs in every community.” McMahon said officers were familiar with the home even before the deaths, responding to disturbances there and last year placing Severance under arrest for allegedly punching her adult daughter in the face.

On Sept. 20, police searched Severance’s home just after noon. After they say they uncovered 97 grams of cocaine in the house, they arrested her on a charge of trafficking in cocaine. They arrested Martinez on two counts of possessing a class B drug after they say they found Percocet and Suboxone in her purse for which she had no prescription.

In court Monday, Martinez posted \$250 bail and Severance was ordered held on \$1,000 cash bail.

Deaths investigated

First Assistant Northwestern District Attorney Steven Gagne said in an email Thursday that the toxicology reports on the two deaths at the home are still being conducted.

"The evidence and observations made during both responses to 175 Pleasant St. were indicative of drug overdoses," he said.

McMahon also said the deaths were suspicious. "I will say it's highly unusual to have two people pass away at a relatively young age in the same place like this," he said.

If test results confirm overdoses, he said, charges could be filed against whoever investigators believe is responsible for providing the drugs.

McMahon said 175 Pleasant St. isn't the only address in that part of town that gets regular visits. He estimated that the number of calls to the Pleasant Street area is on par with or only slightly higher than anywhere else in the downtown area. He said the "vast majority" of calls are in the downtown area. "There's just a lot more people there," he said.

Residents of Pleasant, Arlington and Berkeley streets and Hampton Terrace interviewed Tuesday said it is fairly common to see police and ambulances responding to any of a number of houses in the neighborhood, and that they've witnessed disturbances or have been victims of vandalism and car breaks.

Jin Kim said she's only lived at the house next door to Severance's at 171 Pleasant St. since Sept. 1, but she's heard fighting and screaming there several times, though she said she didn't suspect any drug activity there.

"The neighbors told me, 'that house has problems,'" she said. "I'm from New York City though, so I know that kind of stuff happens." Others said the area is usually quiet, everyone knows each other and they are comfortable letting their children play together on the narrow side streets. The area is made up mostly of multifamily homes and duplexes.

"It's quiet most of the time. I don't really see too many problems, maybe you just hear some yelling," said Julia Zegarra, who has lived at 7 Hampton Terrace since June. "It's a very blue-collar neighborhood." She said she never saw the police at Severance's home, or many other people. "Typically with drug houses, there are people coming and going, and I never noticed anything like that," she said.

Zegarra said if it was a drug dealing location, she hopes it has been shut down. "There are a lot of young kids in the neighborhood," she said.

McMahon said that, as with any problem area, police are doing more frequent patrols of that part of town and trying to keep a visible presence.

"We focus on things that are on our radar, based on the information we have," he said.

Easthampton women deny drug charges after cocaine seized

By BOB DUNN @BDGazette

NORTHAMPTON — Two Easthampton women were ordered held on bail after denying drug charges in court Monday.

Marcella Severance, 54, of 175 Pleasant St., pleaded not guilty to a charge of trafficking in cocaine and was ordered held on \$1,000 cash bail.

According to the Northwestern District Attorney's office, police have responded twice at that address for drug overdose deaths since January.

Also in court Monday, Heather A. Martinez, 38, of 7 Berkeley St., pleaded not guilty to two counts of possession of a Class B drug (Percocet, suboxin) and was ordered held on \$250 cash bail.

Both women, who appeared before Hampshire District Court Judge Laurie MacLeod, were arrested in connection with a search warrant executed at Severance's home about 12:08 p.m. Friday. According to Easthampton police, the warrant was the result of an investigation lasting several months.

Authorities say police recovered about 97 grams of cocaine from the house Friday, and the district attorney's office estimated its street value at about \$9,000.

According to court records, Severance at first denied there were any drugs in the house, then said an "unknown man" brought something into the house and there may have been some drugs in a candy tin. She then refused to say anything else to police.

Police found about 36 grams of cocaine in a metal tin and another 62 grams in a plastic shopping bag, according to court records.

While searching the house, police found three Percocet pills and a strip of suboxone inside Martinez's purse. According to court records, Martinez told police she did not have prescriptions for either medication.

The women are due back in court on Oct. 25 for a hearing to determine if a change in their bail is warranted.

Cocaine seized, two arrested in Easthampton

By BOB DUNN @BDGazette

EASTHAMPTON — Police arrested two women on drug charges after a Friday afternoon search recovered cocaine valued at more than \$9,000 from a Pleasant Street home.

Police arrested Marcella Severance, 54, of 175 Pleasant St., on a charge of cocaine trafficking between 28 and 100 grams, and Heather Martinez, 38, of 7 Berkeley St., on two charges of possession of a Class B drug (Percocet and suboxone) without a prescription.

Police said the Easthampton department worked with the Northwestern District Attorney's office Anti-Crime Task Force for several months investigating a drug trafficking organization allegedly run by Severance.

The search warrant was executed at 12:22 p.m. and recovered more than 90 grams of pure cocaine with a street value of over \$9,000, the prescription pills and "other drug-related paraphernalia,"

according to police and the district attorney 's office.

Severance was held on \$5,000 bail, and Martinez was expected to post \$500 bail, according to a spokeswoman for the district attorney 's office. They are expected to be arraigned Monday in Northampton District Court.

10 lbs. of pot seized in Shutesbury

Special to The Recorder

SHUTESBURY — Ten pounds of marijuana packaged for resale, with a street value in excess of \$20,000, was seized from a Shutesbury home Friday afternoon.

Police Chief Thomas Harding said Shutesbury police officer Jeffrey Soto, with assistance from state police and a state police K9 unit, executed the search warrant at 2:30 p.m. and located the illegal drugs inside the residence.

The 28-year-old Shutesbury man who lives at the home will be summoned to court on a charge of possession with intent to distribute a Class D substance, Harding said.

The marijuana was sealed in 10 individual bags, each weighing about one pound, Harding said.

The search warrant was prompted by an ongoing investigation coordinated with state police, Harding said.

Gun, drugs seized in two traffic stops

By BOB DUNN @BDGazette

NORTHAMPTON — Two unrelated traffic stops by Northampton police Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning led to the arrests of three local men on drug and weapons charges.

Among the seized items was about \$1,000 worth of Molly, a form of the drug MDMA, a sawed-off shotgun and ammunition, according to police.

Arrested on charges of possessing a sawed-off shotgun, possession of a firearm without a firearms identification card, and possession of ammunition without a firearms identification card, were Neneh Kry, 31, of 464 East State St., Granby, and Vinson Johnson, 23, of 38 Rolling Green Drive, Amherst, at 9:29 p.m. Tuesday on Jackson Street.

Kry was also arrested on charges of second offense operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol and cited for a marked lanes violation.

Johnson faces an additional charge of possessing a Class C drug (clonazepam).

According to police, the vehicle Kry was driving was pulled over after an officer saw it swerve into the oncoming lane toward him.

Kry failed a series of sobriety tests, after which officers spotted the weapon, a Mossberg 500A shotgun, in the vehicle.

Both men denied possession of the weapon, police said.

During a search, Johnson also allegedly was found to have 115 pills of the anti-anxiety medication clonazepam for which he did not have a prescription, according to police.

In an unrelated case at 1:42 a.m. Wednesday, police arrested Alexander Volgin, 18, of 893 West St., Amherst, on charges of unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle, operating an unregistered motor vehicle, possessing a Class B drug (Molly) with intent to distribute, two counts of possessing a Class B drug (Adderall, cocaine) and possessing a Class C drug (hashish).

According to police, an officer on patrol spotted Volgin's vehicle on King Street without a rear license plate and pulled it over.

A background check revealed Volgin's license had been suspended in Connecticut and he did not have a valid Massachusetts license, which prompted the arrest and search of the vehicle.

Police seized two small bags of hashish, a small bag with a white powder believed to be cocaine, five pills of Adderall for which police said Volgin did not have a prescription, and 47 pills of Molly valued at about \$1,000, police said.

Northampton Police Detective Lt. Jody Kasper said despite its increasing notoriety, the department deals infrequently with cases involving Molly, compared to other drugs such as heroin and cocaine.

All three men pleaded not guilty during their arraignments in Northampton District Court on Wednesday.

Kry and Johnson were both ordered held on \$300 bail and are due back in court on Oct. 31.

Volgin was released on his own recognizance and is due back in court on Oct. 18.

Northampton siblings deny cocaine charges

By BOB DUNN @BDGazette

NORTHAMPTON — Two Northampton siblings denied cocaine trafficking charges in court Tuesday and were ordered held on bail.

Luis Dellarosa, 37, and his sister, Norma Cardonna, 54, of 260 Main St., Apt. 1, each pleaded not guilty before Hampshire Superior Court Judge Daniel A. Ford to charges of cocaine trafficking and conspiracy to violate drug laws.

Dellarosa was ordered held on the same \$10,000 bail set at his arraignment in district court. Cardonna was ordered held on the \$500 bail also set in the lower court, according to the court clerk's office.

According to court records, the Northwestern District Attorney's Anti-Crime Task Force executed a search warrant July 22 at the address where the two live.

During the search, about 60 grams of cocaine, \$4,800 in cash, an electronic scale, baggies and other evidence were seized, according to prosecutors.

In arguing for bail, Assistant Northwestern District Attorney Jeremy Bucci cited prior convictions of both defendants including multiple assault and battery convictions for Dellarosa and convictions on charges of trespassing, possession of a Class B drug and prostitution for Cardonna.

The two each face a minimum mandatory sentence of 3½ years on the conspiracy charges and up to 20 years on the trafficking charges, according to prosecutors. Dellarosa and Cardonna are due back in court Dec. 19.

Four deny heroin charges after traffic stop for loud exhaust

By BOB DUNN @BDGazette

NORTHAMPTON — An excessively loud car exhaust landed four men in court Tuesday to face heroin distribution and other charges.

William E. Cordova, 28, Leonardo Alvarez, 19, and Jonathan C. Mateo, 24, all of Holyoke and William Nieves Jr., 28, of Bethlehem, Pa., pleaded not guilty in Northampton District Court to charges of possession of a Class A drug (heroin) with intent to distribute and conspiracy to violate the drug laws.

Mateo also faces a charge of unlicensed operation of a motor vehicle and Alvarez and Cordova were cited for failure to wear a seat belt.

According to court records, a trooper patrolling Interstate 91 in Hatfield stopped the vehicle in which the four men were traveling north for having a loud exhaust about 5 p.m. Monday.

Mateo did not have a valid driver's license and Nieves said he and the others were on their way to Greenfield to see a car that he found online and was interested in buying. However, Nieves could not tell the trooper what type of car or the name of the person selling it and said he was carrying only about \$15 in cash, according to court records.

A background check also revealed Cordova has prior convictions for drug distribution, according to court files.

A search of the vehicle recovered about 200 bags of heroin, packaged into four blocks of about 50 bags each, according to court records. None of the men admitted that the heroin belonged to them, according to state police.

All four men are due back in court on Nov. 1 for pre-trial hearings.

Crime task force hopes to take more direct approach

Wednesday, May 15, 2013
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Drug charges in Franklin County in recent years have less often been preceded by a battering ram at the door than by flashing blue lights in the rear-view mirror.

Local police say they have not had the numbers or the time for lengthy investigations recently, a situation the district attorney and state and local law enforcement hope to reverse with a new regional task force aggregating what time and resources are available.

Currently, the majority of drug charges are incidental, often transforming a traffic stop for a defective taillight or expired registration into a felony when drugs are found during booking or vehicle searches.

A stop for loud exhaust in November, for instance, ended in a foot chase, fight and the arrest of passenger William Darmanchev, then 19, of 36 East Cleveland St. Darmanchev faces charges in Greenfield District Court on assault

and possession with intent charges related to 47 wax paper bags of heroin and nine hydrocodone pills found in a pill bottle he allegedly dropped.

Anti-Crime Task Force

The Northwestern District Attorney's Office this winter formed a 47-town anti-crime task force to serve Franklin and Hampshire counties, financed by an \$81,288 state grant.

Assistant District Attorney Jeremy Bucci, chief trial counsel and in charge of drug prosecution, said drug dealers will be among the task force's first targets.

At the moment, narcotics appear more often as an underlying cause than the principal crime, with tight resources keeping local departments occupied with patrols and reacting to emergencies than long-term investigations.

"Heroin addiction appears to be motivating many of the major crimes in the area including bank robberies, robberies of convenience stores and what has been a crushing rash of breaking-and-enterings in the area," Bucci said.

"One of the earliest agendas of the task force will be to combat the proliferation of opiates in the area."

The Northwestern Anti-Crime Task Force succeeds the Hampshire-Franklin Narcotics Task Force, an earlier pooling of state and local resources. That task force dissolved about two years ago, leaving investigations up to local departments, often without the resources to take on the time-consuming and expensive projects.

Acting Detective Lt. Daniel McCarthy of the Greenfield Police Department describes the drug problem as tidal, with specific substances ebbing and flowing as one becomes cheaper or more available than the others, and the area is particularly susceptible to these ebbs and flows due to its location on I-91.

In the late 1990s crack cocaine became enough of a problem locally that Greenfield police sought federal assistance. "We did a huge sweep, raids, we did a number of raids on houses ... lengthy investigations, but only having to do with crack cocaine," McCarthy said.

Later, the multi-department Hampshire-Franklin Narcotics Task Force performed a function similar to the variety of federal agencies involved in the earlier sweep, with local departments cooperating to address another uptick in drug use and related crime.

That task force fell victim to shrinking budgets and the loss of the Greenfield officer who spearheaded the program.

McCarthy said he began to notice more and more interaction with heroin around 2009.

"Now it's 2013, the (new task force) ... is just our next response to the problem that is going on out there," he said.

No perfect solution

Bucci said he suspects the county has some mid-level dealers, but there is no perfect in-county solution to the problem.

With the flowers grown overseas and across borders, local police won't be burning any poppy fields.

And local law enforcement says there is little sign of a real gang presence locally.

Most arrests seem to be of individuals, couples or small groups of friends traveling back from Holyoke, Springfield, Hartford or Brattleboro, Vt., with defective taillights, missing license plates, expired registrations or other relatively minor causes for a traffic stop.

Montague narcotics detective Leon Laster, a member of the former narcotics task force and the current anti crime task force, said he has seen dealers from 14-year-olds through middle-aged holdovers from heroin's heyday in the 1970s.

"The '70s was when that really rocketed, heroin became really, really huge, then it kind of died off because cocaine became popular .. Now, cocaine is still out there, so is crack, but you don't see it as much as you see heroin," he said.

Fighting the problem at a local level can be frustrating for police because the problem has its roots far outside their local jurisdiction, because they lack manpower and because dealers have learned from past mistakes.

Laster said there is an impression that the last round of investigations and raids by the two-county task force and the state police solved the-then crack problem.

"Let's not be jaded — we didn't stop the drugs, we forced them inside," Laster said. "That made it harder. People think we don't care or we aren't doing anything ... in order to kick that door in I have to have probable cause."

Funding is always an issue, Laster said. An oftentimes lengthy, and therefore costly, investigation is necessary to obtain a search warrant, and executing the warrant also requires extra officers.

Much of the problem is numbers.

McCarthy uses the analogy of a kettle of boiling water, in which the water is crime.

A sufficient number of hands on the lid can keep the water in, but there are not a sufficient number. In April, McCarthy said the Greenfield Police Department's narcotics detective was temporarily back on patrol duty due to an injury that had further strained the schedule, and a typical shift consisted of a watch commander and two officers on patrol.

The Greenfield department has recently been given permission to hire, but training new officers will still take time.

This is the problem the task force is designed to address, aggregating hours and expertise from the many small departments to focus on investigations no department might be able to afford alone.

Optimistic about task force

Jarret Mousseau, narcotics officer for the Athol Police Department and a member of the new task force, describes the difficulty of fighting the drug trade in a secondary or tertiary market.

"Now and again if we whack somebody good with a search warrant and they're like a main player in the area, the price will jack up for a couple weeks until somebody else starts really taking over," he said.

"We'll hit the main supplier for the area, specific to heroin, and I swear to God it takes a day and somebody just takes over," Mousseau said. Local prices might spike briefly, but that void is quickly filled and business resumes.

Mousseau is optimistic about the new task force, though.

“I think we’ll be able to make a dent around here. It’s been a long time since there’s been a specific, dedicated force,” Mousseau said. “State police have their own narcotics unit but they’ve been hit with manpower issues as well.”

Speaking in March, Bucci said he expected to see the anti-crime task force make some arrests by June, providing the information needed to fully understand the scope of the problem.

In April, the DA’s office announced the arraignment of Gary Lefebvre, 32, of Granby, in Eastern Hampshire District Court.

Lefebvre faces charges of trafficking in heroin over 18 grams, possession of a class B substance and possession of a class E substance.

Lefebvre was arrested on April 25 by members of the Northwestern District Anti-Crime Task Force, after police executed three search warrants and discovered the defendant to be in possession of what they allege was at least 800 bags of heroin packaged for distribution, according to a release from the Northwestern District Attorney’s office, which put the street value at \$8,000.

Lefebvre was also reportedly found in possession of at least 30 prescription pills and about \$430 in cash. Police allege he admitted to selling drugs to six to nine people and said the cash found on him was the proceeds of drug distribution.

“With the continued commitment of the many contributing law enforcement agencies I hope that jurisdictional manpower concerns soon become a thing of the past,” Bucci is quoted as saying in the release. “I expect that this will be one of many investigations focusing on thwarting the access to illegal opiates that continue to hurt our community.”

The following week, the DA’s office announced the task force’s second arrest. Kenneth Dennis, 46, of 18 Mechanic Street, Apt. 2, in Orange was arrested at his residence May 3, charged with heroin possession and distribution and firearms charges.

Prescription drug fight

Fighting prescription drug abuse presents its own unique challenges and solutions.

The majority of prescription drugs, Bucci suspects, come from prescriptions at least nominally legitimate. Mousseau said doctor-shopping is common, and a solution might be a strong, interstate and inter-pharmacy reporting system to track prescriptions.

A common practice is to obtain a legitimate prescription — whether or not it is for a legitimate problem — then sell a portion of that insurance-subsidized prescription to buy more pills at another pharmacy at full price, side-stepping insurance tracking.

At the local level, the Northwestern District Attorney’s Office promotes periodic drug take-back days as part of a national program.

According to the office, the take-back campaigns have provided education and outreach to schools, health care providers, elders, youth and families to eliminate access to and prevent abuse of prescription drugs.

“More drugs were collected through this campaign in the Northwestern District than in the entire states of Rhode Island and Vermont,” reads a release highlighting District Attorney David E. Sullivan’s 2011 annual report.

The old advice that unwanted prescription medication be mixed with cat litter or similar materials to make it unappealing when disposing of it has changed in recent years, thanks to concern over what these pills are doing to the groundwater once they land in landfills.

With the dual goal of reducing the potential for abuse and keeping the medications out of the environment, the DA's office this year backed installation of 15 permanent drop-off boxes in Franklin and Hampshire county police stations, specifically those with regular hours. In the area, the big green lock-boxes sit inside the Athol, Deerfield, Erving, Greenfield, Montague, Orange and Sunderland police stations.