

Media Release

Yavapai County Sheriff's Office

Scott Mascher – Sheriff

255 E. Gurley Street, Prescott, AZ 86301

Dwight D'Evelyn - Media Coordinator

928-777-7441



July 29, 2015

P.A.N.T. Takes Down Illegal Marijuana Growing Operation – 6 Arrested



This release was delayed as the investigation has been extended beyond the arrest date –

Over the last several months, detectives from the Partner's Against Narcotics Trafficking Task Force have been investigating a marijuana growing operation in a remote area west of Anvil Rock Road, Seligman. After developing information regarding apparent illicit activities on this specific property, a search warrant was obtained and served July 13, 2015. Additionally, 2 more search warrants related to this operation were served at another Seligman property along with a home in Tempe, Arizona.

This investigation resulted in the arrest of the following on July 13, 2015 - (booking status also noted):

1. Jose Bernal, 35, from Prescott, charged with Production of Marijuana, Possess Marijuana and Fraudulent Schemes and Practices – He has since been released on a \$10,000 bond.
2. Alexander Willing, 34, from Glendale, Arizona, booked on the same charges as Bernal. He has since been released on a \$20,000 bond
3. Cody Snyder, 33, from Mesa, Arizona, booked on the same charges as Bernal. He has since been released on a \$10,000 bond.

4. Angel Saavedra, 22, from Mesa, Arizona, booked on the same charges as Bernal and additionally charged with Falsely Make Written Instrument and Possess/Use Dangerous Drugs - Released on a \$20,000 bond.

5. Steven Walker, 36, from Tempe, Arizona, charged with Production/Possession of Marijuana for Sale, Fraudulent Schemes, Possess/Use Narcotic Drug, Manufacture a Narcotic Drug, Possess/Use Deadly Weapon during a Drug Offense and Possess Marijuana – Released on a \$40,000 bond.

6. Andrew Andrist, 35, from Glendale, Arizona, charges with Production of Marijuana, Leading Organize Crime, Fraudulent Schemes and Practices, Falsify Written Instrument, and Possess Marijuana for Sale – released on a \$15,000 bond.

Additional charges are likely from the County Attorney’s Office.

PRELIMINARY BACKGROUND – Obtaining the Search Warrant –

The focus of the investigation involved the suspect’s efforts to defraud/deceive the Arizona Department of Health Services (DHS) – the agency in charge of issuing marijuana cards/grow licenses to those who qualify. These suspects, all medical marijuana card holders, had submitted the Seligman property as their home address on the DHS application when, in fact, they actually resided elsewhere. By using the Seligman address, the suspects were attempting to avoid the 25 mile rule which allows a medical marijuana patient cardholder to grow up to 12 plants if their home is outside the 25 mile radius of a medical marijuana dispensary. Although the Seligman locations would qualify as grow locations, none of the suspects actually live there. It should be noted that most marijuana card holders in Arizona live within the 25 mile radius of a dispensary as is the case with the suspects. Detectives also found that DHS had no record listing the property as a medical marijuana dispensary.

Additionally, detectives learned the suspects had been illegally blocking nearby easements to prevent access to the property. Persons attempting to use the easements were confronted by armed individuals and told to leave. Suspect Walker, the registered property owner, had a medical marijuana card issued to him as a ‘patient.’ Although his home is in Tempe, he listed the Seligman location as his residential address. During the investigation, PANT detectives confirmed at least one greenhouse containing marijuana plants was present on Walker’s property. These and other facts led to the issuance of the initial search warrant for Walker’s property.



A portion of the growing operation

The Search and Follow-Up -

A search of the Walker owned grow location resulted in the seizure of 52 marijuana plants along with several firearms. This investigation led to another nearby Seligman property on Moonshine Road, co-owned by Willing and Andrist, where 60 marijuana plants were seized. A crew of detectives also served a search warrant at Walker’s home in Tempe where they found 82 more marijuana plants along with several bags of psilocybin mushrooms. Possession of this mushroom type is a felony drug crime and would preclude any legal authorization to grow medical marijuana. Even if Walker had the legal status of a caregiver (a person who can provide a restricted

amount of marijuana for a limited number of patients), the amount of plants associated with his two properties far exceeded the legal limit.

Detectives confirmed that each suspect was directly involved in the cultivation operation and had defrauded DHS by submitting false information on their applications. Further information is expected regarding the roles of Walker, Willing and Andrist as property owners of the cultivation sites.

The investigation into this operation remains active. If anyone has additional information regarding these suspects and/or the operation, please contact Yavapai Silent Witness at 1800-932-3232.

PANT will not hesitate to investigate anyone who is willing to conduct illicit marijuana grow activities under the guise of DHS authorization. Those involved in such activity should be aware of Arizona Revised Statute, section 13-2311:

Fraudulent schemes and practices; willful concealment; classification-

A. Notwithstanding any provision of the law to the contrary, in any matter related to the business conducted by any department or agency of this state or any political subdivision thereof, any person who, pursuant to a scheme or artifice to defraud or deceive, knowingly falsifies, conceals or covers up a material fact by any trick, scheme or device or makes or uses any false writing or document knowing such writing or document contains any false, fictitious or fraudulent statement or entry is guilty of a class 5 felony.

Citizens can contact the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office with information or questions at 928-771-3260 or the YCSO website:
www.ycsoaz.gov