

Guest Articles from Florida's Attorney General



*Bill
McCollum*

Law Enforcement In Memoriam

Last month, Florida's law enforcement community experienced a series of terrible tragedies when three of its finest individuals were killed and a fourth was gravely wounded, all in the line of duty.

The most recent tragedy struck during a vehicle pursuit that crossed into Geneva County, Alabama. **Holmes County Sheriff's Deputy Joe Galloway** was killed in an automobile accident while pursuing a reckless driver. Deputy Galloway had served the Holmes County Sheriff's Office for just over a year and had already made a significant impact on everyone around him. He was remembered as a man of principles, the strongest among them being a commitment to compassionate service.

Days before Deputy Galloway lost his life, **Hillsborough County Sheriff's Deputy Ron Harrison** was killed in a hail of bullets while en route home from a traffic checkpoint. At his memorial service in Tampa, state and community leaders alike described Deputy Harrison as a hero, a selfless man who always put others first. His death, which ended a career just shy of 21 years of dedicated service to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, stripped Florida of an invaluable public servant.

Even more tragic, Deputy Harrison was gunned down on the very day when another fallen sheriff's deputy was being remembered by his family, friends and colleagues. **Broward County Sheriff's Deputy Christopher Reyka** was ambushed and killed while investigating a suspicious vehicle with stolen license plates. Deputy Reyka is described by family and friends as a dedicated and exemplary law enforcement officer, intent upon protecting his community.

To add to the tremendous trials the law enforcement

community faced with the loss of their colleagues and friends, a third deputy continues to recover in Broward County after being shot while conducting a routine traffic stop. **Maury Hernandez**, a five-year veteran, is a detective with the Broward County Sheriff's Office's Selective Enforcement Team. A strong leader, Deputy Hernandez has also been instrumental in providing encouragement and advice to his younger brother who just began serving with the Hallandale Beach Police Department. I know I speak on behalf of Floridians throughout the state when I say that Deputy Hernandez has our unconditional support as he progresses towards a full recovery. (See related article on page 12.)

Florida has more than 53,000 law enforcement officers working in city, county, state and federal agencies to protect our residents and guests. It is difficult to express in words how much we owe to the dedicated men and women who put their lives on the line every day in the name of public safety. I invite you to take a moment with me to recognize the ultimate sacrifice Deputies Reyka, Harrison and Galloway made for us, the people of Florida. I would also ask that the entire state remember the Hernandez family as they stand by Deputy Hernandez through his recovery, as well as the families of Deputies Harrison, Reyka, and Galloway as they continue to grieve the loss of their loved ones.

These men, like every other man and woman in our state who works tirelessly to protect each and every one of us, are heroes. My thanks, and the thanks of our great state, goes out to our law enforcement community. We will always stand with you, but especially now in your time of tragic loss. ■

Hydroponic Marijuana Operations Rise

Marijuana is the most popular illegal drug in America. Studies have shown that approximately 97.5 million Americans have tried the drug and more than 50 percent of young adults aged 19-28 have reported using the drug. In one Western state, the marijuana industry is estimated at \$1 billion in wholesale value, which is more than that state's wheat and potato industries combined.

The most alluring aspect of marijuana's resurgence is its potency. Thirty years ago, the average THC content (THC produces the high and causes physiological problems) in Woodstock-era marijuana was approximately four percent. Today's hydroponic marijuana grown in Florida has tested above 20 percent THC content and continues to rise through plant cloning by growers. This increase in potency has not only increased the dangerous physical effects of the drug, but also the addictive nature associated with marijuana use. Experts believe that the rate of addiction among daily marijuana users is now higher than that among daily alcohol drinkers.

Marijuana grow houses primarily specializing in hydroponic marijuana have been detected in 41 of Florida's 67 counties, and Florida had the second highest number of grow house seizures in the country in 2006. Florida-grown hydroponic marijuana can be traded pound for pound with cocaine. A pound of hydroponic marijuana can normally sell for \$4,100 in Miami. While Florida still sees a significant amount of the more traditional marijuana with lower THC content grown in fields and imported from Central America and other states, the hydroponic marijuana cultivated in grow houses or shipped in from Canada appears to be significantly more potent and is the primary cause of the dramatic increase in the marijuana threat to our state.

The increase in the drug's potency has also caused marijuana's market value to skyrocket. The drug is so lucrative that grow houses are popping up in some of the most affluent neighborhoods throughout Florida. These "Marijuana McMansions" are home to multi-million dollar

growing operations. In 2006, law enforcement in Tampa dismantled an elaborate marijuana growing scheme operated by an 11-person group that owned or rented 10 houses and apartments in Hillsborough, Pasco and Hernando counties.

A similar operation was recently discovered and shut down in North Florida, where an organized ring of individuals had been using seven houses to grow and distribute large quantities of marijuana. The grow houses produced 100 pounds of marijuana per month, which sold for \$4,500 per pound. Even with the tremendous expenses associated with running this illegal operation, the drug traffickers were able to net profits of more than \$460,000 per year. The Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution is currently prosecuting this case and aggressively working with law enforcement to pursue other trafficking operations throughout the state.

As the profit incentives increase for trafficking hydroponic marijuana, the risks to our children and fellow citizens also increase. Grow houses are often the targets of other violent crimes, including home invasions and robberies carried out by rival criminal groups, as the plants alone are worth tens of thousands of dollars. Marijuana is no longer grown and traded by amateurs—it is being trafficked by organized and dangerous rings of criminals who are intent upon bringing this poison into our communities and neighborhoods.

It is our responsibility to not only educate our citizens—especially those who are younger and may be more susceptible to drug use—but also to work together to identify potential strategies for curbing the spread of this new and dangerous threat. We must continue to strengthen our laws, our investigations and our prosecutions in order to attack these sophisticated criminal organizations with the severity they deserve, and we must remain ever vigilant in our duty to protect Florida from the drug dealers at our doorstep. ■

THE QUITTER

Fate handed the quitter a bump, and he dropped;
The road seemed too rough to go, so he stopped.
He thought of his hurt, and there came to his mind
The easier path he was leaving behind.
Oh, it's all much too hard, said the quitter right then;
I'll stop where I am and not try it again.

He sat by the road and he made up his tale
To tell when men asked why he happened to fail.
A thousand excuses flew up to his tongue,
And these on the thread of his story he strung,
But the truth of the matter he didn't admit;
He never once said, I was frightened and quit.
Whenever the quitter sits down by the road
And drops from the struggle to lighten his load,
He can always recall to his own peace of mind
A string of excuses for falling behind;
But somehow or other he can't think of one
Good reason for battling and going right on.

Oh, when the bump comes and fate hands you a jar,
Don't baby yourself, whoever you are;
Don't pity yourself and talk over your woes;
Don't think up excuses for dodging the blows.
But stick to the battle and see the thing through.
And don't be a quitter, whatever you do.

~ Edgar A. Guest