

Drug Agents of the Henderson County Sheriffs' Office, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, and the US Drug Enforcement Agency, executed a search warrant at 441 North Harper Lane in Henderson County this morning. Arrested as a result of evidence seized were Geoffrey Bleichner, 27 years old and his wife, Megan Bleichner, 24 years old. At the scene of the initial search warrant on North Harper Lane, officers found a residence that had been totally reconfigured inside to serve as a large scale marijuana growing and processing operation. In fact, once inside, there was little to indicate that the house had ever been used for human habitation. Grow lights, thermometers, grow tables and timers surrounded by green vegetation indicated a well designed grow house. Rooms were sectioned off for various stages of plant development from starting sets to cutting and drying rooms and final process and packaging.

Sheriff Rick Davis said that "This search warrant was the result of an ongoing investigation and that his officers were still in the process of evaluating evidence and possibly serving more search warrants as the investigation continues. This is a complex and organized venture and the marijuana seized appears to be some of the highest quality we have seized to date. The street value of this particular seizure is \$832,800 on the conservative side, due to the quality of the plants. It should also be noted that these type of grow operations can easily produce a full harvest every 12 to 14 weeks. I am very pleased with the work of our investigators along with the SBI and DEA, who are always so willing to assist with manpower and investigative assets as needed."

Officers seized 79 plants that were being processed, and another 268 still being tended. Over the years, marijuana cultivation has come to rely on genetic engineering that allows for strains now that produce plants with a THC content up to 10 times more potent than what was commonly used in the late 60s. THC is the active ingredient in marijuana, which produces the euphoric high that users seek. Marijuana grown and harvested through indoor factories such as this one is typically "high potency yield".

Both suspects were charged with the following crimes and each placed under the bond listed:

Possession with intent to manufacture, sell or deliver marijuana – \$10,000

Manufacture of marijuana - \$15,000

Maintaining a place sell, deliver, or manufacture a controlled substance - \$5,000

Trafficking in marijuana - \$30,000

Possession of drug paraphernalia - \$1000