

**UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI**

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NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

**Execution Of Federal Arrest and Search Warrants
In Furtherance Of Project Safe Neighborhoods**

Cape Girardeau, Mo. -- United States Attorney James G. Martin, along with representatives from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the United States Marshals Service, the Caruthersville and Kennett Police Departments, the Pemiscot and Dunklin County Sheriff's Departments, the Bootheel Drug Task Force, and the Sikeston Department of Public Safety, today announced that 25 federal arrest warrants have been issued for residents of the Southeast Missouri area under the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative. Project Safe Neighborhoods is America's Network Against Gun Violence with the goal of "making America's communities safer."

"The most basic fundamental duty of our Government is to ensure the safety of its citizens, in their homes, in their communities, and on their streets," said United States Attorney James G. Martin. "Today, more than 100 local, state and federal law enforcement officers have come together in Southeast Missouri in an effort to do just that."

"At 6:00 a.m. this morning, more than 100 law enforcement officers from nearly a dozen local and state agencies joined together with federal agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the United States Marshals Service to serve warrants authorizing the arrest of 25 Southeast Missouri men on federal firearms and drug distribution charges," said Martin. The arrest brings to a close a 14 month long corroborative investigation targeting dangerous felons who possess and use firearms and traffic in illegal narcotics in several Southeast Missouri communities in and around the I-55 corridor. The investigation is part of a Department of Justice program designated as Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). It is an enhanced federal initiative between ATF, other state and local law enforcement agencies, and the United States Attorney's Office, that targets suspects in firearms-related cases. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a nation-wide commitment to reduce gun crime in America by networking existing local programs that target gun crime in providing those programs with the additional tools necessary to be successful.

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Between fiscal years 2001-2004, more than \$1 billion has been committed to this effort. This funding is being used to hire new federal and state prosecutors, support investigators, provide training, distribute gunlock safety kits, deter juvenile gun crime, and develop and promote community outreach efforts, as well as to support other gun violence reduction strategies. Through unprecedented partnerships among federal, state and local law enforcement, each United States Attorney has implemented the five core elements of Project Safe Neighborhoods (Partnerships, Strategic Planning, Training, Outreach, and Accountability) in a manner that is contoured to fit the specific gun problems in that district. The goal is to create safer neighborhoods by reducing gun violence and sustaining the reduction.

Aggressive prosecutions of gun and drug cases are having a direct impact on public safety. For example, as federal firearms prosecutions have increased by 68% over the past three years to record levels, almost one million fewer violent crimes were committed in 2002 than in 2000, and a two-year average violent crime rate for 2001-02 was 21% lower than for 1999-2000. In fact, the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted annually by the Bureau of Justice Statistics shows that violent crime is currently at its lowest rate in 30 years.

As noted by the United States Attorney General John Ashcroft, "by aggressively prosecuting gun cases, especially those involving violent repeat offenders, defendants are receiving longer periods of incarceration. As these dangerous felons are taken off the streets for longer periods of time, our neighborhoods are becoming increasingly safer."

Despite an overall decline in the number of gun homicides during recent years, gun crime in America remains intolerably high. All told, 2/3 of the Nation's 16,000 homicides in 2002 were committed with guns. Nearly half a million people are victims of non-fatal firearms crimes each year. Of particular alarm is the high toll gun crime takes on young people. Almost 1/3 of those murdered in 2002 were between the ages of 13 and 24. Eight-two percent of murder victims age 13 to 24 were killed with a gun in 2002. Young people also use guns to commit criminal acts. In 2002, nearly half of all known murders were between the ages of 13 and 24, and a majority of those criminals used firearms to kill their victims.

"The United States Attorney's Office would like to take this opportunity to commend the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and in particular, Agents for the Cape Girardeau Office, who have worked literally hundreds of hours spearheading this investigative effort," Martin said. "But more importantly, the real purpose of this press conference is to recognize each of the local and state agencies, many of which are represented here today, for their vital contributions to the success of this effort. The road to success for combating violent crime is paved by the hard work and dedication of the local officers and their departments who so valiantly serve to protect all of us each and every day. The arrests today are a direct result of your determined and dedicated efforts. And for that, we are deeply appreciative."

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Mark S. James, Special Agent in Charge, Kansas City Division, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) stated, "I am grateful to all of our law enforcement partners who participated in this operation, especially the Caruthersville Police Department, who was involved at its inception. Through the local law enforcement agencies, who know the area and the local criminal element the best, this coordinated effort became possible."

The United States Attorney's Office will remain dedicated to working together with our local and state agencies in continuing to combat violent crime and ensuring the safety of all our citizens.

Those agencies participating in this investigation, and whose efforts we wish to recognize include: the Caruthersville Police Department, the Pemiscot County Sheriff's Department, the Bootheel Drug Task Force, the Kennett Police Department, the Dunklin County Sheriff's Department, the Sikeston Department of Public Safety, the United States Marshals Service, the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Cape Girardeau Police Department, and the Blytheville, Arkansas Police Department.

At this time, 18 defendants have been taken into custody and will be making an appearance in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri today. Those individuals are identified as:

NAME	ADDRESS	CHARGE
Eddie Taylor, Sr.	711 E. 10 th St.; 1312 Hickory Ave. Caruthersville, MO 63830	Distribution of Marijuana (5 counts); Distribution of Cocaine (9 counts); Aiding & Abetting the Manufacture of Cocaine Base (6 counts); Distribution of Cocaine Base; Forfeiture Allegations
Aaron Woods	306 E. 11 th St., Caruthersville, MO	Distribution of 5 Grams or More of Cocaine Base (3 counts)
Garnett Fisher	412 W. Grant, Hayti, MO	Distribution of 5 Grams or More of Cocaine Base
Otis Jones	1208 Knowles, Blytheville, AR	Conspiracy to Distribute 5 Grams or More of Cocaine Base; Interstate Travel in Aid of Racketeering; Aiding & Abetting Interstate Travel in aid of Racketeering; Manufacturing 5 Grams or More of Cocaine Base; Felon in Possession; Forfeiture Allegations
Jimmy Caldwell	516 Foster Ave., Portageville, MO	Distribution of 5 Grams or More of Cocaine Base (2 counts); Felon in

		Possession (2 counts)
Ezell Vaughn	Unknown	Felon in Possession
Antjuan Ruff	730 Kennedy, Hayti Heights, MO	Felon in Possession; Possession w/ Intent to Distribute Marijuana
Steve Lott	105 Thompson, Sikeston, MO	Felon in Possession
Michael Robinson	703 W. Gladys, Sikeston, MO	Felon in Possession
Deundra Davis	1221 Gladys, Kennett, MO	Felon in Possession; Possession w/ Intent to Distribute Marijuana
Jermaine Battles	203 Taven, Caruthersville, MO	Selling a Firearm to a Felon
Steve McClendon	107 Randall, Blytheville, AR	Felon in Possession
Ray Rodgers	1503 Davis, Caruthersville, MO	Felon in Possession
Marcus Taylor	309 Highland, Caruthersville, MO	Distribution of Cocaine
Eddie Taylor, Jr.	Caruthersville, MO	Distribution of Cocaine
Shaun Woods	MO DOC	Felon in Possession
Cedrick Rogers	MO DOC	Felon in Possession; Using & Carrying a Firearm During a Drug Trafficking Crime
Claude Taylor	Pemiscot County	Felon in Possession

The investigative efforts are continuing and additional arrests are expected.