

NEWS-PRESS Charlotte

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Reports From Staff Writers,
Bureaus And Wire Services

2 arrested in jury's drug probe

By PETER G. JOHNSON
Charlotte Bureau Chief

PUNTA GORDA — Two more people have been arrested on indictments handed down last week by a grand jury investigating drug smuggling in Charlotte County.

Berry Lynn Barnes, 18, of Englewood, was arrested by sheriff's deputies early Tuesday morning. William Stepp, 25, of Sarasota, surrendered to authorities shortly before noon.

Mr. Barnes is charged with criminal conspiracy and sale of marijuana. Stepp, who also was arrested in a July drug bust, is charged with criminal conspiracy and possession of more than 100 pounds of marijuana.

A third person indicted by the grand jury, 25-year-old Robert Arhuckle, of Nokomis, turned himself in at the Charlotte County Sheriff's Department on Monday.

Arhuckle is charged with criminal conspiracy, illegal importation of marijuana and possession of more than 100 pounds of marijuana with the intent to sell.

Two others indicted by the grand jury still are at large and authorities say their identities will remain secret until they are in custody. Stepp and Arhuckle are charged with conspiring with at least two other people to bring marijuana into the county.

Arhuckle was arrested along with two other men at the Bonita airport in July with three bags of marijuana hidden in the nose cone of their airplane.

Months before the arrests, witnesses say the plane touched down on a deserted street in North Port and delivered its cargo of drugs to a man waiting in a pickup truck.

The truck later was stopped by authorities in Sarasota County and found loaded with 30 bags of marijuana and a pound of cocaine. Stepp, the driver of the truck, was arrested by Sarasota lawmen.

Assistant State Attorney Gene Berry would not say if the two men arrested with Arhuckle are the other two persons indicted by the grand jury.

Arhuckle was arrested with Homer "Al" Ross, a Sarasota attorney, and James Carvajal, of Columbus.

Both Ross and Carvajal have failed to appear at scheduled court hearings and their arrest warrants out for their arrests.

Berry, who served as legal adviser to the grand jury when it met last week, would not disclose any of the details surrounding Mr. Barnes' involvement in drug smuggling activities in Charlotte County.



Lab tests show murdered girl was killed by fire

By KAREN FELDMAN
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — Laboratory tests confirmed Tuesday a medical examiner's findings that 12-year-old Linda Pkavetz died from burning and smoke inhalation.

Dr. Peter Tan, the medical examiner who performed the autopsy Oct. 13, the day after Linda was murdered, said Tuesday that samples were taken from Linda's body and tested for alcohol, carbon monoxide and a variety of drugs, but his tests were inconclusive.

"The tests confirmed our findings that the girl died after burning but otherwise, it showed nothing new," Tan said.

According to Lt. William Clement, chief investigator for the Charlotte County Sheriff's Department, the fire was caused by a cigarette. The presence of smoke in the little room indicated that the victim was breathing shallowly at the time the fire was lit.

Tan declined to comment on whether the girl or the person found with her was set alight, but a sheriff's department official, who asked that his name be withheld, said that the cause of the fire was a cigarette.

No tests were done to determine the substance used to ignite the fire, Tan said.

added that the sheriff's office probably will ask the FBI to conduct such tests.

Clement said Monday that several descriptions of "suspicious" people who might be the killer of the blonde seventh grader are being checked out by investigators.

A sketch of a suspicious person seen near Meadow Park Elementary School was turned over to authorities by a witness last week.

Clement said his department "would like to know who that person is." He added that investigators are having little luck matching the sketch with a person because "it fits so many people."

He declined to release the sketch or describe the suspect because it might jeopardize the investigation.

As the sheriff's office continues searching for the killer, county residents are taking some precautionary measures to prevent another such event.

Turn To MURDER, Page 18

D'Alessandro tells senators red tape hinders drug war

By FRANCES D. WILLIAMS
News-Press Staff Writer

MIAMI — State Attorney Joseph D'Alessandro of Fort Myers told a U.S. Senate subcommittee Tuesday that federal red tape is severely restricting efforts to halt heavy drug trafficking in Southwest Florida.

"What I'm talking about is supply and demand," D'Alessandro told a U.S. Senate subcommittee on investigations Tuesday in Miami. "And there is an enormous amount of red tape involved in the criminal justice system, and we never recover this order of magnitude of drug traffic."

D'Alessandro and Ralph Cunningham, D'Alessandro's chief assistant, were asked to testify before subcommittee members Sen. John Chafe, D-R.I., and Sen. Lawton Chiles, D-Fla., in aid of their investigation into drug traffic in Florida, with emphasis on Southwest Florida.

The first session of the two-day of hearings began at 10 a.m. in the federal court-

house central courtroom.

U.S. marshals provided tight security during the hearings, searching everyone going in or out of the courtroom.

"There is a bottleneck in Washington, D.C.," D'Alessandro said, "and the U.S. government is either going to enforce the law and supply the necessary manpower necessary for this type investigation or quit any and all attempts at investigating organized, criminal activity."

D'Alessandro suggested putting pressure on foreign countries supplying marijuana. "We're tired of off foreign red tape," he said. "Maybe then some of these countries would loosen and give us instead to stand behind what we say."

Cunningham was more optimistic. "Customs has been destroyed — or at least their effectiveness," he said. "They are no longer an investigative agency and without the Federal Enforcement Administration (DEA), they are like one arm, and the DEA does not cooperate with anyone."

Turn To DRUGS, Page 18

Hanging around

Hang-out characters like the one, plus Drunken, unskilled, hooded Fang and other crew personalities, will gather Saturday and Sunday only. Admission is \$1 for adults and 50 cents for children. Mr. Smith said the house will include a terrace chamber, a graveyard, miniature, witches, bats, goblins and "a few surprises."

the county's 4-H Club, according to Pat Smith, county extension director. The house, located at the county clubhouse in Harbor Heights, will be open Saturday through Sunday, from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. It also will be open from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday only. Admission is \$1 for adults and 50 cents for children. Mr. Smith said the house will include a terrace chamber, a graveyard, miniature, witches, bats, goblins and "a few surprises."



County Administrator John Printon recommended terminating some CETA positions

CETA employees get uniform reprieve

By KEVIN BLOOM
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — The 11 Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) employees under contract with the Charlotte County Commission were given a two-week reprieve Tuesday.

Commissioners used to renew the employees' contract for one two-week pay period.

In the interim, County Administrator John Printon has been directed to determine which of the 11 positions, if any, should be made permanent.

Printon said he recommended terminating the program for a number of reasons.

"We are receiving contrary directives from the Department of Community Affairs and the Department of Administration," Printon said. "It has made the administrative procedures more and more cumbersome."

Most of the conflict lies in whether the county should award

the CETA employees the same benefits given to full-time county employees.

Printon said the county commission's objective of administering the program has been met.

"The purpose was to provide employment training and we think we have accomplished that," Printon said.

Initially the commission agreed to the program as a means of lowering the county's unemployment rate. Printon said.

Recent figures indicate the unemployment rate has dropped. Printon said, "we feel that we've done our part."

Clerk of the Court Buddy Alexander said the complications in drawing up a payroll for the employees have arisen because of a lack of direction from the federal government.

"We have received no clear direction from the government about the future of the program," Alexander said.

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Commission rejects curfew for juveniles

News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — A countywide curfew for juveniles was rejected by the Charlotte County Commission Tuesday.

The commission had been asked by Norm Thibodeau, night manager of Boulevard in Port Charlotte, to consider a curfew to curb vandalism.

Chairman Arnold Schade said

that after consulting with Sheriff Alan Loftis the commission decided to defer action on the request.

"We expected specific action on this because it would complicate the sheriff's responsibilities," Schade said. "We don't think our taking any action would have the desired effect and the sheriff doesn't think he could enforce a curfew."

Inside Today's B-Section

• THEODORE BLINDY is back in custody in Tallahassee after being granted a continuance in his first-degree murder trial in Lake City in the slaying of 12-year-old Kimberly Shue Leach. 58

County withdraws application for grant to equip ambulances

By KEVIN BLOOM
News-Press Bureau

PUNTA GORDA — A \$12,500 grant application to help equip ambulances was ordered withdrawn by the Charlotte County Commission Tuesday.

The application, already approved by the state, would have provided telemetric signaling equipment for county ambulances.

The equipment monitors vital signs while a pa-

tient is in an ambulance and transmits them to hospitals where physicians can instruct paramedics on treatment enroute to the hospital.

A referendum to provide advanced life support in county ambulances was defeated Oct. 5.

The referendum was cited by commissioners as the reason for ordering the application withdrawn.

"We've got to listen to the referendum," Commissioner Dr. Robert Sheild said.