

# Major State Drug Bust Nets Andover "Grow House"

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Concord Monitor staff

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[On December 13,] state and federal authorities seized nearly 6,700 marijuana plants worth \$28 million from several New Hampshire homes in what the police are calling the biggest drug bust in the state's history. To the surprise of even veteran drug investigators, many of the plants were found in upscale homes worth more than \$400,000.

"These are not the homes that you'd typically look at and say, 'That's a drug house,'" said Col. Frederick Booth of the state police. "The sophistication of the operation was surprising. This is a wake-up call for New Hampshire and for those people who think this doesn't happen in New Hampshire."

The homes included one in Concord where Booth said the police found 800 plants worth \$3.2 million. Other local homes included addresses in Andover [22 O'Neill Drive, owned by Hong Bach Nguyen], Canterbury, Pembroke, Hopkinton, and Wear. The growing operations relied on stolen electrical power, Booth said, which required someone to rewire the homes and bypass the electric meter.

Booth said the multi-agency drug investigation, which included local and state police as well as federal drug agents and the New Hampshire Army National Guard, began about two months ago after big drug seizures in Hooksett and Epsom. [In Andover, one Andover police officer was part of the entry team that first secured the house, and three Andover officers participated in the search team.]

All the homes – the 10 raided [on the 13th] and those in Hooksett and Epsom – are listed as being owned by Vietnamese men or women.

Most of the homes raided [including the one in Andover] were not being lived in and were empty aside from the growing equipment, the police said. Two of the eight [including the one in Andover] did not have marijuana plants

in them but only evidence of a growing operation, the police said. [According to Andover Police Chief Glenn Laramie, the home in Andover "reeked of marijuana," but the plants had apparently been removed because the basement had flooded.]

According to land transfer records, many of the listed owners have owned the homes only for the past few months. The Andover house was sold to its current owner in 2004, but nearly all the others transferred hands after mid-April of this year.

The authorities distributed photographs of the homes yesterday, and from the outside they looked like photographs from a Realtor's brochure. Inside, it was a different image.

The basements looked like commercial growing operations, with some marijuana plants still in the seedling stages and other plants several feet high. The basements included elaborate lighting and ventilation systems. The electrical boxes were covered by a tangle of wires, all rerouted to draw power without paying for it, Booth said.

The wiring alone presents a public risk, the police said. The [fire in the Hooksett home that started the investigation] began because the home's illegal underground bypass caught fire. In other incidences, the rerouting of power caused pole transformers to explode, the police said.

Booth and June Stansbury of the federal Drug Enforcement Agency urged members of the public to keep an eye on homes in their neighborhood. If the home is uninhabited but gets a lot of visitors, tell the police, they said. Also look out for homes with the curtains always drawn or power problems in your own home. The police also urged real estate agents and lending officials to be more watchful about the people using their services.

Stansbury said the location of these "grow houses" in affluent neighborhoods is proof that drugs are everybody's business. Anyone with information about drug activity can relay it anonymously to 800-NAB-DOPE.

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# POLICE BLOTTER

The Andover Police Department responded to 263 calls for service from November 15 through December 15. The following is a partial breakdown:

- Motor vehicle warnings - 112
- Motor vehicle summons - 15
- Traffic arrests - 2
- Reckless driving complaint - 1
- Road rage complaint - 1
- House checks - 9
- Suspicious person/vehicle - 9
- Theft - 1
- Burglary - 1
- Accidents - 3
- Animal complaints - 5
- Assist fire department - 3
- Assist ambulance - 2
- 911 calls - 2

## Arrests

- Joshua Clark, 19, Hillsboro, Operating after suspension, disobeying a police officer
- Leroy Laflamme, 24, Franklin, Habitual offender, disobeying a police officer, operating after suspension
- Jacob Avery, 18, New London, Warrant arrest
- Dennis Mcintire, 38, Franklin, Reckless operation, speed
- Paul Dunbar, Concord, Failure to notify change of address
- James Strahan, 21, Andover, Warrant for taking without owner's consent
- Andrew Labonte, 17, Salisbury, Speed
- Kurt Barton, 19, Andover, Abandoned vehicle



Glenn Haley prepares for the Andover Fire Department's annual poinsettia fund raiser. Photo: Bob Bussey

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