

Published February 25, 2009

## 5 arrested in federal drug busts

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The federal Drug Enforcement Agency raided eight South Sound homes hosting suspected indoor marijuana grows Monday - seizing a total of 4,495 marijuana plants from two Olympia homes, two in unincorporated Thurston County, one in Fife, one in Lacey, one in Puyallup and one in Kent, court records state.

Five people — including two who list Ontario, Canada, addresses — face criminal charges in connection with the busts and were arraigned Monday in U.S. District Court in Tacoma. All five were arraigned on federal charges of conspiracy to manufacture and distribute marijuana and possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, according to a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office.

The five charged were identified as Amanda Ky Nguyen, 62, of Seattle; Quang Vinh Vu, 48, of Ontario; Quoc Viet Huynh Nguyen, 28, of Glendale, Ariz.; Ha Thuy Le, 43, of Ontario; and Xuan Thanh Trang, 35, of Massachusetts.

The busts were part of the DEA's Operation Green Reaper, its ongoing investigation of indoor marijuana grows in Washington. The investigation has been active since 2007.

U.S. Attorney's Office spokeswoman Emily Langlie said Tuesday that one of the purposes of Operation Green Reaper is to ensure marijuana growers from Canada do not gain a foothold in Washington. She said increased border security after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks has affected Canadian marijuana growers who want to sell in the United States.

"As border security has tightened up, there perhaps is an attempt to see if you can avoid the border by growing it down here," she said.

A search of Thurston County assessor's records shows that two of the homes busted Monday were purchased in 2007. One of the busted homes, on Coleman Avenue in Olympia, was bought by Quan Truong of Fort Meyers, Fla., for \$260,000. Another, on Timber Court in Thurston County, was purchased by Vincent Do of Irvine, Calif., for \$319,000.

Another Olympia home that was busted Monday, on Lenox Court, had foreclosed earlier in 2009 and is owned by a bank. The Lenox Court home was formerly owned by Long Truong, according to data from the assessor's office.

According to a criminal complaint filed Monday in federal court:

- **Le**, who occupied the Timber Court residence, told investigators through a Vietnamese interpreter that "she was hired by others to take care of the marijuana grow at 2705 Timber Court Southeast and was being paid \$5,000 per month."
- **Approximately** 600 grams — "more than 1,000 doses" — of the club drug Ecstasy were found at the home on Destination Avenue in Fife that was busted Monday.
- **Vu** "admitted acting as caretaker and tenderer of multiple grow houses involved in this investigation," including the Lenox Court, Coleman Avenue and Timber Court addresses.
- **Notes** appearing to be drug ledgers were found at the residence on 126th Avenue in Kent, along with 5 pounds of processed marijuana.

One of the first suspects charged criminally as part of Operation Green Reaper, former Scitek Garden Supply owner Thiet Van Tran of Seattle, was convicted Thursday of conspiracy to manufacture marijuana and money laundering.

Tran, who "knowingly promoted the manufacture of large quantities of marijuana in indoor, residential operations throughout the region," according to a DEA news release, faces a potential sentence of 10 years to life in prison.

The National Drug Intelligence Center's 2009 "Drug Threat Assessment" found that "Asian criminal groups, including some that have relocated from Canada to the United States, have established cannabis cultivation operations throughout the United States ... Some Asian DTOs (drug trafficking organizations) that operate grow sites in Western states are linked organizationally to groups in other regions of the country, suggesting coordination among some Asian DTOs cultivating cannabis in separate regions of the country."

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