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Underground grow sites yield huge marijuana crop

Law enforcement officers last week raided four locations – two in Illinois Valley – and uncovered three underground marijuana grow sites; seizing some 5,440 plants, said Josephine Interagency Narcotics Team (JOINT). The illegal weed will be destroyed by burning,

but not in the form of marijuana cigarettes known as joints. On Thursday, Dec. 11 at 7:30 a.m. 60 lawmen from 12 agencies raided two locations in Illinois Valley and one in Wolf Creek, and uncovered three underground sites for growing marijuana.

At 1620 Reeves Creek Road in Selma, officers found a 50-by-50-foot below-ground grow site with more than 3,500 plants. They also found a three-story underground grow site under construction, and investigators estimate it would have been capable of growing another 5,000

to 7,000 marijuana plants, said JOINT. Investigators believe that the confiscated marijuana was destined for an organized crime distribution network in California. The case represents one of the largest during the past several years in Josephine County.

Mentioned in connection with the three search warrant services are Rex Denham, 26, of the Reeves Creek Road address; Freddie Tamayo, 34, of 5565 Westside Road; and James Conn, 34, of 4201 Coyote Creek Road in Wolf Creek at the north end of Josephine County.

No arrests were made, and investigation is continuing. JOINT said that its detectives have been working for two years on leads to develop information about “several underground grow sites in operation in Josephine County.”

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Flu season hits valley fairly hard

By MICHELLE BINKER ‘Tis the season. For the flu, that is. And this year’s strain is wreaking havoc throughout the northern hemisphere. Illinois Valley is not immune.

This rampaging virus, a Fujian strain of Influenza A, has sent thousands of people to hospitals, and is responsible for the deaths of several children in the western United States, and six children in England and Scotland.

In Illinois Valley, health workers are dealing with a fair number of people with flu and flu-like symptoms.

Eve Marsh, a registered nurse who works at Siskiyou Community Health Center (SCHC) in Cave Junction, reported that only a few children from the valley have been sent to hospitals, and they have recovered quickly. Marsh noted that underlying asthma may have contributed to the severity of those cases.

School absences increased considerably during the past week. At Lorna Byrne Middle School’s Health Center, registered nurse Ruth McBride said they’ve been sending a few students home every day. Evergreen Elementary had 150 (nearly one-third of the student population) out sick on Monday, Dec. 8 although attendance has improved since.

Principal Lise Van Brunt credits parents for being very aware of the outbreak, and keeping sick kids home.

“We haven’t really had too many feverish kids in class,” she said, though during one point early in the week there may have been “20 or 30 kids per hour” in the office having temperatures taken.

Cathy Zook, administrator at Dome School, said they “have definitely been hit. Fortunately, we haven’t had too many absences all at once.”

Sudden onset of a fever is a typical flu symptom, as are severe body aches, headache, weakness, dry cough and nasal discharge. In the event of illness, it is important to prevent dehydration, and to contact a physician if the condition lasts for

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HOLIDAY HOOPS - Glide High School captured first place in the girls and boys categories at the annual Holiday Tournament hosted by Illinois Valley High School in Ken Mann Memorial Gym on Friday and Saturday, Dec. 12-13. Named to the girls all-tourney team: Kim Hamilton and Emily Dudley of I.V. High, Katie O’Brien of Cascade Christian, Krista Meeks of Gold Beach, and Brooke Smith of Glide. Glide’s Amy Croll was named Most Valuable Player. On the boys side, the Cougars’ Jon Riley attained the all-tournament team, along with Brandon Fair from Cascade Christian, Nic McNair and Wil Price of Gold Beach, and David Hill of Glide. The boys MVP was listed as Brandt Petersen, also from Glide.

New I.V. Fire Chief Rich has 34 years under belt

By MICHELLE BINKER Harry Rich, who has 34 years of fire fighting experience in California, will start as chief of Illinois Valley Fire District on March 1.

District directors convened for a special, one-hour meeting on Sunday night, Dec. 14 in Cave Junction City Hall. After brief discussion of the compensation package and probationary period, Director Joe Malcolm moved to accept Rich as the district’s new fire chief. The board approved the motion 5-0.

Rich was among six candidates; five of whom were interviewed by the board Saturday, Dec. 13.

Rich, who has 34 years experience as a firefighter and EMT in the city of Los Angeles and Big Bear City fire departments, brings to the job a goal-oriented approach and a resolve to work in concert with the policies set by the board to shape the future of the district.

“I want to bring the board solutions, not problems,” he said, accepting the board’s approval. “I look forward to the challenge, and the opportunity.”

The first item on the new chief’s agenda is to bring more volunteers on board. Board Chairman Joel Downing concurred on this issue. “We would all support a more active drive” to recruit more volunteers, Downing said.

Additionally, Rich said he would like to have a school program to get youth involved in the fire service.

Rich cited his extensive experience in risk management, and proposed a “support team” to analyze and mitigate risks to district firefighters. Furthermore, Rich said he would pursue funding through bonds, obligation grants, or state funds, to replace old equipment.

Rich, 56, and his wife, Lorraine, are building a

home in Cave Junction, and are committed to staying for the long haul. “This is where I want to finish my life; this is where I want to raise my dog,” said Rich, smiling. The couple have four grown daughters.

When he retired from his position as a fire captain in L.A., Rich said his wife, who is originally



Harry Rich

from Grants Pass, allowed him to choose “anyplace within a 100-mile radius” of GP. He chose Cave Junction. After reading about the fire district’s need to hire a new chief in the “Illinois Valley News” and elsewhere, he decided to apply.

“I take great pride in having been an L.A. city firefighter,” said Rich. “I will take great pride as a firefighter for the Illinois Valley.”

Board member Larrick Jones was enthusiastic about the new hire. “He’s very sharp,” said Jones. “He’ll make a good chief.”

The district’s training officer, Jeff Gavlik, who has been serving as interim fire chief since March, when Kyle Kirchner resigned, is pleased with the new hire. “This is a positive movement for the district,” he said.

Rich asked the board for 65 days to finish work on his house and wrap up business in L.A. before getting down to work in Illinois Valley on March 1.

The fire chief’s salary will start at \$55,000, and after a six-month review could rise to \$65,000.

Biscuit comments extended

Jan. 20 is the new deadline for public comments on the Biscuit Fire Recovery Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), according to the U.S. Forest Service.

The Jan. 20 date is the result of a 15-day extension

announced by the forest service’s Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest office in Medford on Friday, Dec. 12.

In choosing the length of the extension, Forests Supervisor Scott Conroy

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Early ‘I.V. News’ deadline for the next two issues (Dec. 24 and 31):

*Noon Thursday, Dec. 18; paper comes out Tuesday, Dec. 23
*Noon Wednesday, Dec. 24; paper comes out Tuesday, Dec. 30