

## Major Meth Operation Taken Down Locally

Written by Steve Frank

Saturday, 08 December 2012 19:46

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Citing it as a great example of law enforcement cooperation, Narcotics officers with multiple law enforcement agencies concluded a lengthy narcotics investigation in Watauga County early Friday morning, calling it the culmination of a five year investigation. The probe involved the Watauga County Sheriff's Office, the Boone Police Department, the State Bureau of Investigation, the North Carolina Alcohol Law Enforcement Agency and the United States Department of Homeland Security. The release said the investigation targeted a closely knit network of drug distributors involved in the sale and distribution of methamphetamine in the Watauga County area. Officers identified Luis Enrique Garcia as the main distributor in this group. The 671-B Howard's Creek Road in Boone, man charged with Trafficking in Methamphetamine after a search warrant was executed at Garcia's residence early Friday. During the search of this residence, narcotics officers seized a large amount of US currency, items of drug paraphernalia and approximately one pound of crystal methamphetamine with a street value of \$57,120. According to the release, narcotics officers believe Garcia to be one of the largest distributors in the Watauga County area, and Boone Police Chief Dana Crawford said, "This case is a real victory for law enforcement and the citizens of Boone, as well as, all of Watauga County. This seizure will definitely have an impact on the drug trade in our region for some time." He said the nature of this investigation required many different and challenging investigative techniques including physical and electronic surveillance.

Sheriff Len Hagaman called it "a perfect example of intra-agency cooperation at its highest. Through this effective and coordinated operation, these narcotics officers were able to successfully infiltrate a major and well organized methamphetamine distribution operation and take a substantial amount of meth off of our streets. He said that he is "very confident that there will be more arrests and successful prosecutions as these local, State and Federal agencies move forward with this investigation." Drug detection K9's from both the Watauga County Sheriff's Office and Boone Police Department were utilized during this case. Cooperation among these agencies was the key to the success of this investigation. The release said that more arrests can be expected in this investigation. Along with Luis Enrique Garcia, 39, Javier Gomez Sanchez of the same 671-B Howard's Creek Road address was charged with Trafficking of methamphetamine. Both men will be referred to ICE for possible immigration action.

Photo: K9 Maus with drugs from seizure