

Norwalk drug dealer gets 12 years in federal prison

TOLEDO — A Norwalk man was sentenced to 12 years in a federal prison Monday in the western division of the U.S. District Court, Northern Division of Ohio.

Michael D. Baker, 43, most recently of 4645 Laylin Road, was convicted of one count of conspiracy to distribute marijuana and cocaine after a federal trial that ended Nov. 30. He was one of 16 suspects arrested at the conclusion of a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) investigation that lasted from April 2001 through October 2005.

Huron County Sheriff's Capt. Bob McLaughlin is pleased with Baker spending the next 144 months behind bars. He was one of 15 to 20 witnesses, which included a co-defendant and multiple police officers.

"I think it's good for Huron County," the drug investigator said. "It seems appropriate to me."

McLaughlin said Sheriff Richard Sutherland should be pleased because Baker didn't just use the Laylin Road residence as a "stash house," but had been selling marijuana and cocaine in the county for "a number of years."

U.S. Assistant Attorney Joe Wilson said Baker's prison term was "driven" by a mandatory sentence, meaning the judge couldn't put him behind bars for less than 10 years. Wilson called the defendant a "career offender" since he had two previous drug trafficking convictions in the early 1990s, one stemming from a Wood County incident.

Early in the local investigation, Mark Apple, an agent with Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI&I), requested McLaughlin check Laylin Road for Baker's vehicle after the defendant moved from Fostoria. The detective said authorities then started a surveillance of the home.

"He (Baker) set up shop and rented the house at Laylin Road," said McLaughlin, who worked with the 10-county drug task force METRICH during the investigation.

Investigators discovered Baker was dealing drugs through tips from confidential informants, Wilson said, one of whom bought 8 ounces of cocaine from Baker at a Townsend Avenue business Aug. 14, 2003.

McLaughlin earlier estimated Baker sold drugs with a street value of "hundreds of thousands of dollars" and had people deliver drugs and money to his Laylin Road home.

Wilson said he appreciated the "extraordinary cooperation" and was grateful of the support from local law enforcement officials in investigating and convicting Baker. The prosecutor attributed the success of the case to Apple and fellow BCI&I Agent Kip Lewton, who "spearheaded this whole thing."

Baker was the main target in the investigation that eventually led to 28 suspects being indicted and convicted. Co-defendant David K. Scott, 38, of 829 Woodbine St., Willard, testified against Baker. Scott, who is out on bond, also has been convicted of conspiracy to distribute marijuana and cocaine.

No sentencing date has been scheduled yet for Scott, but Wilson said the hearing should happen in the next 30 to 60 days.

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