

Marijuana heaven

Sheriff's raid harvests a record number of pampered plants

By JOHN BRANTON
The Columbian

Sheriff's deputies Wednesday drove down a secluded private drive near Dollars Corner and raided an indoor marijuana-growing operation believed to be the largest ever found in Clark County.

Deputies armed with a search warrant seized an estimated 300 high-quality sinsemilla marijuana plants with a street value of about \$250,000 in the 12:30 p.m. raid at 25333 N.E. 72nd Ave.

Arrested at the scene was John S. Kelley, 35, believed to be the owner of the approximately 12 wooded acres. He was released after posting \$6,500 bail Wednesday night.

Deputies said Kelley drove up in a pickup after deputies and prosecuting attorneys had arrived, and that he offered no resistance when arrested. Deputies found no one else there.

Deputies were seeking a woman they believe lived with Kelley on the property overlooking Daybreak Park on the East Fork of the Lewis River.

Inside a converted two-car garage near the house, deputies found:

- Four-foot-tall seedless marijuana plants, vibrant with health, their inch-thick buds nearly ready for harvest, stood in raised growing beds held up by heavy boards.

- Mirrorlike silver plastic sheeting covered interior walls, reflecting light and heat toward the plants.

- Halide grow lights, 18 of them in the largest room, hung from the ceiling, their cone-shaped shades three feet in diameter.

- A 4½-foot-tall metal cylinder filled with carbon dioxide stood near the door, its hose connected to a two-burner stovetop suspended in the air.

"They inject carbon dioxide into the atmosphere so the plants grow faster and hardier," an undercover deputy said.

- Identical electric fans, 10 in the largest room, circulated the air inside. Other cylindrical fans blew air into the room. The room's air-exhaust system was filtered through water to prevent a strong marijuana smell in the area, a deputy said.

- Liquid plant fertilizer stood in four large plastic containers, each 4 feet high, marked "Swiss Apple Juice Concentrate."

A deputy estimated the growing equipment would have cost as much as \$50,000, including about 65 large grow lights worth \$500 each.

In a basement beneath the house, deputies found a nursery for tiny plants. Each plant was grown from a "start" by placing a leaf and stem in water, a deputy said. About 100 small plants sat on a rack under long florescent lights. Overhead, a large halide light hung from a moveable track system operated by an electric motor.

Also in the basement were areas used for drying marijuana, with strings suspended from one wall to another, and leaves drying on some strings.

Inside the residence, deputies seized a rifle and a bottle of white pills that were to be analyzed.

Authorities say Kelley moved here in February from Alaska, where he was a fisherman. He then bought the property and began his operation. The investigation began in March after two "concerned citizens" reported suspicious activity, an undercover deputy said. The

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investigation included monitoring Kelley's electric power consumption, a deputy said.

Deputies allege that Kelley hid his power consumption by removing the inside of the PUD meter at times, then replacing it before meter readers came onto the property. In his latest billing period, the reading showed he used less power than an average household, deputies said.

A doberman dog found on the property was captured and taken to the county animal shelter.

A yellow metal building on the property contained raised beds with cut-off stems visible in the dirt, indicating that plants grown there had been harvested earlier, deputies said.

Inside a small green shed on the property, about 20 2-foot-tall marijuana plants were growing in an environment like that in the large garage. Hundreds of black plastic planters were stacked inside.

Investigators said they had no information about other persons who might be involved in the operation.