

Notorious Drug Property In Kent County Closed As Criminal Nuisance

Other properties around state closed or individuals banned as part of DOJ focus on properties that are sites of criminal activity.



A house that police and prosecutors said was part of an open-air drug market in southern Kent County was recently shut down and the residents evicted after a court declared it to be a “criminal nuisance property.” The investigation and action on the property on Unity Lane near Greenwood was part of a focus by a team of attorneys and investigators at the Department of Justice partnering with state and local law enforcement to target such properties at the direction of Attorney General Matt Denn.

The property at 118 Unity Lane is part of an area near Greenwood known as “The Hole” that has been a location for drug transactions for some time. The dirt road that leads to it has been dug up so that police vehicles or other vehicles must slow down considerably upon entering the road, allowing criminal suspects to flee the area through the woods that

surround it. A Delaware State Police investigation in conjunction with DOJ investigators monitored a number of drug transactions in the area.

As a result of a criminal nuisance action filed by DOJ attorneys in Superior Court alleging the property to be the source of criminal activity and a "blight to the surrounding community," a judge on July 7 entered a judgment granting Permanent Abatement Relief against the property. The order banned Frank Lovett, Latasha Lovett, Annette Stevens, Lucy Lovett, Charles Lovett and Taquen Owens from the property and declared the property be shut down for a period of two years. Frank Lovett has pending criminal charges for Organized Crime and Racketeering, Drug Dealing, Conspiracy Second Degree, and Possession of Drug Paraphernalia.

On August 4, DOJ investigators, DSP troopers and members of the Kent County Governor's Task Force escorted occupants out of 118 Unity Lane and barricaded the house, posting a sign that declared it to be a criminal nuisance property.

"One or two properties with criminal activity can bring down an entire neighborhood and cause innocent residents in the area to live their lives in fear," Attorney General Denn said. "That's why our office has worked so hard over the last year to target such properties. I commend the troopers, attorneys and investigators who worked to close this property in The Hole, and who have impacted other properties as well through our focused efforts."

The Attorney General especially recognized Deputy Attorneys General Beth Savitz, Carla Jarosz and John Grimm, DOJ investigators Mark Hawk and Pete Fraley, DSP Lieutenant Lance Skinner, and DOJ paralegal Rapsody Johnson for their work on the Unity Lane case.

The original court complaint with background of the property at 118 Unity Lane can be found [here](#).

Other properties targeted in recent months by DOJ and police under the law that allows addressing criminal nuisance properties include:

1107 Washington Street, New Castle: This case involved a residence in New Castle which was known as a den of illicit drug use and prostitution. The police were called to the location numerous times for events ranging from fugitives fleeing into the residence, to receipt and storage of stolen property, to the overdose death of a dog. A final nuisance abatement order was obtained through default judgment in November 2016. Thereafter, police and prosecutors alleged the homeowner, Sarah Hinrichs, continued to permit prostitution to occur on the property. Hinrichs and Nicole Culley were arrested at the property for acts of prostitution in January 2017. A civil contempt order was sought and obtained against Hinrichs on April 20, 2017, barring her from the premises. The property was ultimately sold to new owners.

16 Defoe Circle, Newark: This property was the site of drug and gun activity and over 50 police calls in the past four years. In March 2016, property inhabitants Thomas Epperson and Frank Lare were arrested for various drug charges relating to their possession of 291 bags of heroin, and a January 2017 administrative search found Thomas Epperson and Allen Stevens in possession of heroin, marijuana and drug paraphernalia. Property owner Nora Epperson had been arrested for drug violations numerous times, and Thomas Epperson took responsibility for what had been happening at the property. The Eppersons entered a consent order August 15, 2017 with DOJ stipulating that Thomas Epperson would not have contact with the property or the area surrounding.

121 E. Lockwood Street, Middletown: This property was the alleged site of drug dealing and gun activity. After numerous undercover drug purchases, Middletown Police Department recovered 2,028 bags of heroin, a handgun, and a shotgun from the property. Michael Thomas admitted to selling heroin and

was arrested as a result of the incidents. Property owners George Young and Rose Young entered into a consent agreement on June 28, 2017 with the state forbidding Thomas from having contact with the property.

867 N. Broad Street, Middletown (The Water Lily): This was a massage parlor where suspected prostitution occurred. It was formerly owned by Da Zhong Wang, who is the subject of an ongoing civil racketeering complaint involving prostitution. Wang sold the property to Michael De Maria of Galloway, New Jersey, who subsequently employed a tenant/successor in interest who was charged with prostitution and may be a victim of human trafficking. Ultimately the massage parlor was shut down by the owners of the strip mall, who were notified of the activities in question through a certified nuisance abatement letter from DOJ in March 2017. De Maria's lease has been terminated.

2614 Thatcher Street, Wilmington: This property was the site of drug dealing. After numerous community complaints, Wilmington Police Department executed a search warrant and recovered 79 oxycodone pills and over \$2,000. Occupant Jamila Speight pled guilty to drug dealing in September 2016, and was previously charged with drug dealing in 2009. DOJ obtained a default judgment in June 2017 against Speight preventing her from entering the property and the surrounding area, and required her to pay a \$500 civil penalty. Additionally, a sign will be placed on the property declaring it a criminal nuisance.

The state's Criminal Nuisance Abatement Act empowers the Attorney General "to eliminate locations that otherwise attract criminals, violence and the threat of violence," as stated in Title 10, Section 7102 of the Delaware Code.

DOJ's recent efforts have been the result of a number of DOJ attorneys from different sections of the department volunteering to work on an internal task force to prepare

these actions in addition to their other job responsibilities. This effort has been led by Deputy Attorneys General A.J. Roop and Greg Strong.

A release on previous DOJ criminal nuisance work can be found [here](#).