

# UCSO keeps busy with manhunt, drug busts and theft investigations

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Last weekend, a seven-hour manhunt ended in a suspect being arrested for allegedly threatening to kill two of his family members on May 18, said Staff Sgt. Shane Burnette of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

The manhunt began around 9 a.m. that Saturday, after E-911 dispatchers received a call accusing the suspect, James Carlos Sparks Jr., 48, of Blairsville, of making the threat, Burnette said.

Sparks had gotten upset with relatives at their house, and when he left the scene, he allegedly said that he would return later with a gun to kill them, Burnette said.

When Sheriff Mack Mason heard the call go out and learned of the potentially credible threat, he immediately responded to lead the hunt for Sparks.

"I was very familiar with this individual, familiar with the families," said Mason. "Due to the nature of the threat that had been made, I felt it was imperative that we find this subject as fast as we could."

The sheriff quickly organized the effort to locate Sparks. He called on Staff Sgt. Burnette, Lt. Julio Cruz and deputies Chris Jackson, Josh Bridges and Brody Brackett of his Patrol Division to get the job done, making sure to station a deputy at the residence where the threat had been made.

Just prior to Sparks' capture, Deputy Bridges learned that the wanted man may have arrived at another relative's home. Bridges relayed the information to Burnette, who was near that area at the time, Burnette said.

As it turned out, the information was good.

"I saw his vehicle in the yard," said Burnette. "I pulled up, and he was stepping away from it, and I took him into custody from there."

Sparks was arrested without incident on two felony counts of making terroristic threats, and further investigation resulted in a DUI charge as well.

Sheriff Mason was happy with his deputies' response that afternoon, especially in light of such a potentially dangerous situation.

"Threatening to take somebody's life is a serious offense, and in this county, we're not going to tolerate that," said Mason. "Now, we've turned it over to the courts to settle it."

In other Sheriff's Office news, the Narcotics Division recently made two separate drug busts that resulted in the arrest of five people.

On May 11, investigators executed two search warrants on a property being rented by Jesse Ivan Nichols, UCSO Lt. Tyler Miller said.

"The warrants followed a five-month-long investigation involving methamphetamine sales," said Miller. "During execution of the warrants, approximately 113 grams of

methamphetamine was seized with a street value of \$11,300, along with two arrested.

"Jesse Ivan Nichols was arrested for two counts of sales of methamphetamine and one count of trafficking methamphetamine. Megan Mary Ross was arrested for trafficking methamphetamine."

And just two days later, on May 13, the Narcotics Division made three more drug arrests stemming from another lengthy investigation, this one involving the sales of cocaine and marijuana, Miller said.

Investigators executed a search warrant at 23 Cherrie Lane that resulted in the seizure of approximately 4 ounces of marijuana, cocaine, two firearms and over \$7,000 in cash, Miller said.

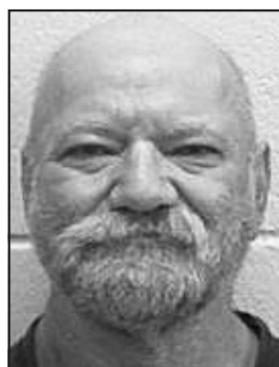
Marke Jama Holland Sr. was arrested on five counts of sale of cocaine, possession of cocaine with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of firearms by a convicted felon, possession of firearms during certain crimes, and possession of drug-related objects.

Marke Jama Holland Jr. was arrested on one count of sale of cocaine, possession of crack cocaine with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of firearms during certain crimes, and possession of drug-related objects.

Deanna Mary Williamson was arrested and charged with possession of cocaine with intent to distribute, pos-



James Carlos Sparks Jr.



Jesse Ivan Nichols



Megan Mary Ross



Marke Jama Holland Sr.



Marke Jama Holland Jr.



Deanna Mary Williamson

session of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of firearms during certain crimes, and possession of drug-related objects.

Both incidents are still being investigated, and more arrests may follow, Miller said.

Over at the Criminal Investigations Division of the Union County Sheriff's Office, investigators are working to solve a couple of mid-May thefts.

On Sunday, May 12, someone parked near the backside of Nelson's Ace Hardware on Old Blue Ridge Highway, cut a hole in a perimeter fence, smashed a front window with an aluminum baseball bat, and stole four Stihl chainsaws out of a window display, Lt. Daren Osborn said.

All told, the stolen chainsaws are valued at over \$1,200, though the actual cost of the crime is certainly higher given the property damage at the hardware store, Osborn said.

The burglary was reported at about 9:30 a.m. that morning by an employee of the store, though surveillance footage revealed that the crime took place shortly before 3

a.m. The person in the video is shown to be wearing a ski mask and hooded sweatshirt, Osborn said.

And on Tuesday, May 14, in an apparent early-morning joyride, an individual jumped a perimeter fence at a vehicle repair shop off T. Chapel Road, stole a semitruck that was in the process of being repaired, and drove it through two gates on the property, Osborn said.

The vehicle was found abandoned on a nearby road hours later, though Osborn did say investigators were able to recover some good physical evidence from the truck.

Also reported in the area

that morning was a backhoe that had been stolen and driven into a ditch overnight, and Osborn said he believes the two instances are likely connected.

People with information about either the Nelson's Ace burglary or the May 14 semitruck/backhoe thefts are being asked to call Lt. Osborn and Staff Sgt. Lamar Dyer of the UCSO Criminal Investigations Division at 706-439-6066.

Generally speaking, the Sheriff's Office advises businesses to install up-to-date surveillance equipment to safeguard against property crimes.

## INCubator...from Page 1A

created a new type of skateboard key, and they plan to test-market it in Southern California, the skateboard capital of the world, this summer.

"We have a lot of specs to send out to manufacturers," said Helton. "We're getting little prototypes over and over again - always refining it. Eventually, it'll get to a point where it's so refined and so polished that you can't resist it."

Senior Hope Bright founded Shutterlink and designed motorized window shutters that can be controlled remotely. Bright was targeting people who travel a lot or have second homes and worry about hurricanes or even burglaries while they're away.

Junior Sky Martinez founded Peltair and designed a cupholder insert that would heat or cool beverages using 12-volt battery power from a boat or motor vehicle using thermoelectric technology.

Martinez thought boat owners especially would be interested in his invention.

The sharks - local businesspeople who agreed to critique the budding entrepreneurs throughout the 2018-2019 school year - listened as each team made its presentation.

The sharks were Ilke Lander of Paradise Hills Resort and Spa, David Hand of Orasi Software, Inc., Chris Wadle of Lamin-X, Will Nelson of Nelson Tractor and Supply, and Joseph Goble of Advanced Digital Cable.

"I just want to say that the effort and work that you guys put in this year, it shows," said Goble, adding that choosing one winner was not easy. "I mean, you can tell there was



Sophomore Aaron Helton and junior Isabella Rosales, who founded Rei-Ki Tool Company, won \$5,000 to get their company off the ground. Photo by Mark Smith

passion. I've learned to get to know you."

Each team was graded on its business overview, investment highlights, explanation of capital requirements with use of funds, overall team effort and enthusiasm within the guidelines, presentation skills and peer assessments.

Becky Dyer, entrepreneur and owner of Pat's Hallmark Store, has acted as the community liaison between the sharks and the INCubator Program for all three years that the program has been in existence.

"As the community liaison, I just get different people from the community who are experts in certain areas who are more on the entrepreneurship side to come in and guide, mentor and coach these students," said Dyer. "So, we have a different community member come in every week

and teach different aspects of the curriculum.

"We have someone from the finance side, we have someone from the legal side, from the marketing side, from the sales and planning side. I just tap into the different community members and bring them in to teach these kids, coach them from a more real-world, practical side."

Dyer continued, "If they learn nothing else, the public speaking and presentation skills they acquire are invaluable."

The high school's Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Josh Davis announced that Coach Howard McCombs would be taking over the INCubator program next year.

"What an honor it's been to work with you guys this year," said Davis to the sharks and the student go-getters that all gave it their best shot.

## Olympics...from Page 1A

beginning with a few 50 and 100-meter dashes divided by different age groups.

Union County High students facilitated the event by acting as scorekeepers for each activity and helping set up each competition.

"I think something like this has a lot of different benefits," said Tiffany Setzer, Special Education Services Director at Union County. "For one thing, it gives them a spotlight to show off the skills that they have."

"It also acts as a way for them to generalize all the skills that they learn in the classroom and working them into an event outside of the classroom. It's supervised by all the teachers, the professionals and their peers."

"So, it is still a safe and structured environment for them to practice their skills like speech, daily living, and all of those things that they learn in the classroom and work every day."

This event is also beneficial for the Towns County students, who get to spend a day with their friends from Union County as they work together to complete the activities.

"We enjoy this, because it's the time of the year that we



Athletes competing at the 2019 Union-Towns Special Olympics on May 20. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

get to show some camaraderie with Union County," said Michelle Pyrluk, Special Education Director at Towns County. "We thought we were going to be held off by weather this year, and we had to cancel one event, so we are happy to see that the weather turned out great."

"The kids really enjoy getting to see each other again, and they form a lot of friendships at these events, and they get to know each other over the years. This is also the time that parents

get to come and participate in something with the teachers and feel like they are part of this team also."

Event participants had crowds of students cheering them on throughout each activity, with the high school band playing and others holding signs rooting for individuals.

"The kids get so excited seeing the support they have at this event," said Setzer. "It's just a wonderful time to get together with everybody and show what these kids can do."

## THURSDAY, AUGUST 1

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