

CAPITAL 22 JAN 2009

# Knocking out warrants in boxing-style sweep

28 people arrested in latest sting by Sheriff's Office

By HEATHER RAWLYK  
Staff Writer

In this corner, more than two-dozen men and women wanted on outstanding drug-related warrants in Anne Arundel County.

And in this corner, county Sheriff Ron Bateman and a team of 30 deputies and county police ready to take them in.

The Sheriff's Office made a dent in the county's backlog of arrest warrants Monday with "Operation Rope A Dope," a boxing-themed sweep that resulted in the arrest of 28 men and women.

From 6 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., about 30 deputies and three county police narcotics unit members split into three teams and fanned throughout the county, knocking on doors in Pasadena, Gambrills, Lothian, and surrounding areas.

Sheriff Bateman had penned a list of

about 80 wanted individuals. By 10:15 a.m., deputies had nabbed more than 25 percent of them, said Deputy Sheriff Harry L. Neisser, a county Sheriff's Office spokesman.

Keeping with the theme of the day, deputies rang an authentic boxing match bell over the police radio after each was arrest made.

No punches or jabs were thrown — all of those arrested were cuffed without incident, sheriff's officials

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said.

Sheriff Bateman said he came up with the theme after deciding to focus the latest sweep on outstanding drug-related warrants. The phrase, "Rope-a-dope" refers to a fighting style coined by champion boxer Muhammad Ali.

"I thought this would be a great way to target these criminals," Sheriff Bateman said. "Ali's phrase was a perfect fit for this special operation. It denotes a winning strategy, and conveniently includes the drug slang word, 'dope.' "

Throughout the morning, individuals wanted on felony warrants were referred to as heavyweights. Those wanted on misdemeanor warrants were called welterweights. And anyone arrested with multiple warrants was considered a Golden Glove, sheriff's officials said.

The sweep was timed on a state holiday to require almost no overtime, Sheriff Bateman said. It is just the latest operation undertaken by the sheriff's office as it works to chip away

at a nearly 10,000-warrant backlog.

Since he took office in December 2006, Sheriff Bateman has organized several creative stings to help catch criminals who have avoided their day in court, and has decreased the backlog from 13,584 outstanding warrants to 9,710, sheriff's officials said.

During a past sting in October 2007, the sheriff's office sent letters to 500 people with outstanding warrants claiming that due to a computer error, they were owed a \$572.26 tax refund and could pick it up at the state office building in Annapolis. Forty people showed up, allowing deputies to clear 54 warrants.

Then again, on Valentine's Day, deputies disguised themselves as flower delivery men to nab another 12 wanted suspects. And in October, deputies arrested 30 people on 33 outstanding warrants during a countywide Columbus Day sweep.

Sheriff Bateman said he's already brainstorming his next creative sweep or sting for later this year.

hrawlyk@capitalgazette.com