

Whitaker speaks to Rotary on need for drug task force levy

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(Photo: Craig Shoup/The News-Messenger)

FREMONT - A Sandusky County police chief said law enforcement has become "complacent" in battling the drug epidemic that has scourged the county, leaving about two dozen dead from overdoses (<http://preview.thenews-messenger.com/story/news/local/2017/03/15/officials-push-drug-task-force/99128480/>) in 2016.

Gibsonburg Police Chief Paul Whitaker, speaking to the Fremont Rotary Club on Monday, said that county police departments are moving forward in the wake of former Sandusky County Sheriff Kyle Overmyer's corruption ([/story/news/crime/2016/12/13/overmyer-sentenced-4-years-prison/95367280/](http://preview.thenews-messenger.com/story/news/crime/2016/12/13/overmyer-sentenced-4-years-prison/95367280/)), working together to combat the drug problem with a better-funded and equipped task force focused on making drug arrests.

"Years ago, when somebody would overdose because of an illicit drug, police would hear about it and talk about it for two weeks. Now when someone talks about an overdose death, I'm hearing my officers say, 'Which one is that?'" Whitaker said. "Even we've become complacent. It's become commonplace."

The Sandusky County Drug Task Force was formed in December 2015, but has been fading slowly due to a lack of funding.

On May 2, voters in Sandusky County will decide on a 0.55-mill levy that would generate \$697,000 annually for five years and provide more full-time task force staffing, an additional assistant county prosecutor to handle drug cases, and more funding to combat drug-related cases.

Whitaker shared in his Rotary talk why the levy is needed.

"Fremont is a hub," Whitaker said. "We need to address this with supply and demand."

The police chief said taking drug dealers off the street and making it difficult for them to sell in Sandusky County will help curtail many problems the drug epidemic has created.

The epidemic is causing a ripple effect in the community, with many crimes linked to drug abuse.

Whitaker said many users will get hooked through pain medication, and when they are unable to get a prescription, begin to steal prescriptions from family members.

"Soon they are cut off from family, and then they call a guy that knows a guy that can relieve them of their pain, which is heroin," Whitaker said.

Whitaker said the county has always been a hub, citing a 2005 bust by state law-enforcement of cocaine coming into a barn on County Road 32 in Gibsonburg, where the drug was being cut with other substances and sent to Detroit for sale.

Whitaker said arresting users is not the answer to curtailing the drug epidemic because drug addicts are the "symptom" of the bigger problem, which is the dealers and suppliers taking advantage of the lack of a drug task force in Sandusky County.

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