



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOUR COLUMBIA RESIDENTS INDICTED IN METH CONSPIRACY

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that four Columbia, Mo., residents have been indicted by a federal grand jury in a conspiracy to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine in Boone County, Mo.

Jeffrey Gayle Merritt, 35, **Chadwick Wayne Acison**, 27, **Laurie Jean Loftus**, 23, and **Sharon L. Baker**, 53, all of Columbia, were charged in a seven-count indictment returned under seal by a federal grand jury in Jefferson City on Aug. 11, 2003. That indictment was unsealed and made public upon the arrest and initial court appearance of several co-defendants. **Merritt's** initial court appearance was held today.

Count One of the federal indictment alleges that **Merritt** and **Acison** participated in a conspiracy to manufacture and distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine from as early as July 12, 2002, to July 19, 2002, in Boone County.

Count Two of the federal indictment alleges that **Merritt** manufactured 50 grams or more of methamphetamine on July 12, 2002, in Boone County.

Count Three of the federal indictment alleges that **Merritt** manufactured 50 grams or more of methamphetamine on July 19, 2002, in Boone County.

Count Four of the federal indictment alleges that **Acison** and **Loftus** conspired to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine from as early as July 12, 2002, to Jan. 23, 2003, in Boone County.

Count Five of the federal indictment alleges that **Acison** and **Loftus** manufactured methamphetamine on Jan. 23, 2003, in Boone County.

Count Six of the federal indictment alleges that **Acison** manufactured methamphetamine on Feb. 26, 2003, in Boone County.

Count Seven of the federal indictment alleges that **Baker** rented an apartment in Columbia that she made available for the purpose of unlawfully manufacturing, storing and distributing methamphetamine.

Graves cautioned that the charges contained in the indictment are simply accusations, and not evidence of guilt. Evidence supporting the charges must be presented to a federal trial jury, whose duty is to determine guilt or innocence.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jim Lynn. It was investigated by MUSTANG (the Mid-Missouri Unified Strike Team and Narcotics Group), the Boone County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Hallsville, Mo., Police Department, the Columbia, Mo., Police Department, and the Boone county, Mo., Fire Protection District – Hazmat Methamphetamine Response Team.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow