

# KENTUCKY'S VOICE

*in the fight*

/Kelly Foreman, Public Information Officer



## Profile of WARCo Task Force Director and KNOA Executive Director Tommy Loving

Kentucky was in danger of watching years of work fighting the drug war collapse around them because of federal bureaucratic bickering and obstinance. Former President George W. Bush signed an omnibus appropriations bill in late 2007, which cut \$350 million in funding from the federal Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant program – a program funding the work of 14 Kentucky drug task forces. The cuts would have crippled drug eradication efforts around the state and the nation.

As director of the Bowling Green-Warren County Drug Task Force, Tommy Loving understood the gravity of the situation. Serving also as the executive director of the Kentucky Narcotics Officers' Association, Loving became Kentucky's voice in the fight to maintain Byrne-JAG funding and forge ahead with the war. As a result of his work, combined with that of other state leaders, the funding was re-secured, and today Loving said the task forces are operating on sound financial ground.

**W**hile the Byrne-JAG battle may be won for now, Loving still fights daily against drug perpetrators in his own Warren County community, and for the needs of his agency and all of Kentucky's narcotics officers through the KNOA.

How long have you been the director of the Bowling Green-Warren County Drug Task Force?

Since 1997. I spent most of my career with the state police – about 27 years. I started when I was 18; I truly did. I went to work in 1970 as a dispatcher. As soon as I was 21, I took the test. Actually, at that time you could take it 30 days before your 21st birthday. I happened to just hit right on that line, so I went in and completed the academy, and I was still 21.

Tell me about getting this task force up and running.

My father had a rental business here. He's deceased now, but at the time, he was probably 83 or 84 years old and he said, 'You know, I really need you to come in and take the business over. I'm getting too old.' And when I crunched the numbers, it was pretty much a financial decision. I had almost 27 years with the state police, so I retired to go to the rental store.

I wasn't really ready to retire, but it seemed like it was probably the right thing to do at the time. What I found out is that fathers and sons probably shouldn't work together. After I had been over there about two and a half months, Warren County Judge Executive Michael Buchanon called and wanted to talk to me about starting a drug >>

>> task force. I knew this was in the works when I was still at the state police. So I went down and talked to him. He talked to me about how it was going to be set up. He, the post commander,

Chief Gary Raymer from Bowling Green Police Department, Horace Johnson from West

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Kentucky University Police and the Warren County sheriff

all had gotten together and sort of devised the structure and basics of how it would work. He laid that out for me and said, 'If you take this job, first I want to tell you a few things I want.'

He said, 'I want every drug dealer that you can find prosecuted and sent to prison. The ones you can't send to prison, I want you to make their lives so miserable they leave Warren County. Probably one of the most important things is I don't ever want to know who you are investigating or who you are about to arrest.'

And I said, 'Judge, you're kind of talking my language. Let me see how I can dance my father around, and I will come down for six months and get it up and running for you. In about three months, why don't you tell me if you're happy with me and I'll tell you what I think, and we'll reassess it.' So we opened the doors Jan. 1. At the time, we had two detectives from BCPD, one from the state police, one from the sheriff's office, and then a little later,

we got one from the university police.

It was started on a six-month grant. So, after about three months I had to start putting a budget together and went in and had a meeting with the judge. The quick version is, I said, 'Judge, you know how much trouble you had getting me to take this job?' (He had just stayed after me to even come talk to him about it and I had put him off.) I said, 'You're going to have just as much trouble getting rid of me, and by the way, we've got to have more money.' That was 12 and a half years ago. I've been here ever since.

This task force operates as the farthest west HIDTA agency. What does that mean for you?

In 2004, we became a HIDTA task force and that has just been a tremendous benefit. It pays our officer overtime, furnishes confidential funds and furnishes a lot of specialized training that is not available in Kentucky. We are able to use their intelligence center, which not only coordinates activities here and throughout the HIDTA agencies, but also all the other 28 HIDTAs across the country. It has direct access to the Drug Enforcement Agency computer systems – it just brings a lot to the table in drug enforcement.

What drugs do your detectives deal with most frequently?

We cover the whole gamut of drugs here. Eastern Kentucky is really inundated with pills. We have a pill problem, but certainly not to the extent they do. We have a significant meth problem here. Crack cocaine is very much alive and well, as are powder cocaine and marijuana. We do buy some hallucinogens, ecstasy and the occasional LSD still, believe it or not. I think being a campus community probably brings some of the ecstasy, LSD and hallucinogen stuff here that you might not see in towns that don't have a university.

Is your coverage area strictly Warren County?

Yes, just Warren County. We have had other surrounding counties early on want to join in, but that was the way the judge, city and county set up the task force, and I am very happy with that. When we are able to just concentrate on one community, we can be a lot more effective in our territory. When I was with the state police, each post area consisted of anywhere from eight to 11 counties in different places I worked. Here you can be a lot more effective taking care of just one.

Do you lend assistance to other surrounding counties?

We do. And some of our investigations branch out into other counties, and when they do, our state police can take those into the counties. But we also work frequently with the Barren County Task Force and South Central that covers Simpson and Logan counties. They are like me – old, retired state police guys. We have great relationships with all the task forces across the state.

Why is it important to have task forces like yours operating in areas of the state?

I think the type of task force we have is probably the ideal task force. Back in the late 80s and early 90s, Bowling Green Police always had a drug unit, the state police had a drug unit – we would be out and find out later that we were probably buying dope from the state people. It's a wonder we didn't try to do reverses on one another and didn't know it because we weren't talking to them and they weren't talking to us. Now, anybody in Warren County involved in drug enforcement has someone assigned to this task force. With that, we get great communication. We all play together well in the sandbox. It's not that way in every community, people tell me.

Why is it important to have a specialized agency to target narcotics activity beyond the level of regular patrol duties within a police or sheriff's agency?

I think drugs are, conservatively, behind 80 percent of the crime. So, I think the more enforcement you can take at strictly the trafficking level to decrease the supply, hopefully you will see that reflected on the other end in related crimes – burglaries and thefts in particular – but also assaults and murders. Don't quote me with certainty here, but I know the bulk of the murders in Bowling Green in the past several years have been drug related. Not that we've had a lot. The fact that we have fairly low numbers may speak not just to what we do, but also to what all the law enforcement here in Warren County does.

How long have you been a part of the Kentucky Narcotics Officers' Association?

Since the start. We started talking about it in 2002, but it was 2004 when we actually kicked it off. I was vice president for two years and then president, and I have served as the executive director for two years now.

What does it mean to be executive director of the KNOA?

I draw the same salary the president does, which is zero. Backing up a little, in 2002, Jim Rogers, who was then the director of the Regional Organized Crime Information Center, invited me to go to a

national narcotic officers meeting in Washington D. C. and he said, 'We'll pay for it if you'll go along.' So I said, 'OK.'

I went up and saw what the national association did and their pitch to us was they really needed a chapter in Kentucky. I came back and we slowly worked on that. A lot of what our association does is educate legislators both in our state and in Washington. We make an annual trip to the national meeting, and while we are there, we go visit all our congressmen and senators. On narcotic issues, we also try to be fairly aggressive in educating our state senators and representatives.

I had been in that role as vice president and president and the board felt like they wanted some continuity in that the legislators are used to seeing my face in Frankfort and in Washington. It is a one-year term as president the way our bylaws are written, so I agreed to stay on as executive director.

We draft a lot of letters in response to national narcotics problems that need a Kentucky face on them in Washington. I work almost daily with the president on issues we as an association are working on. I do a lot of the conference planning, but I guess primarily I function as the 'right hand' to the president at this point.

Why do you think it is important to have a narcotics association chapter here in Kentucky?

I think here in Kentucky, we are a major player. During the Bush administration, they did the best they could to kill the Byrne-JAG program. And I'm not going to let Obama off the hook, either. I think with that, if we hadn't had the national voice of every state coming together and educating the Congress about just what impact it would have if that funding was lost, we would have lost drug task forces across the country. When I say drug task forces, this grant also furnishes money to the drug units for Lexington Metro, Louisville Metro and the state police, so we all would have lost out.

I think that is one of our major accomplishments – we kept that money flowing to fund drug enforcement across the country. It was a battle that really lasted about five years. We certainly have received adequate funding for right now. We have some concerns that it will at least stay at this level or grow a little under the Obama administration, but we're very happy with the financial support this administration has given us. We do have some policy concerns now with the crack cocaine sentencing law, what they call the disparity in it. The only disparity I see is that powder cocaine should have the same sentence as crack. If they want to equalize anything, >>

I want to go a different direction, but that is probably the biggest policy issue we have right now. But, as I've told a lot of people, without that funding, we wouldn't even be alive to fight the battle.

In reference to the Byrne-JAG funding, for awhile you were a very strong-willed educator. Did that help get some of that funding re-secured? Probably about three or four years ago, the Bush administration was pretty successful in getting us cut back by about a third in funding. We were able to go at that time to Senator Bret Guthrie and senators Robert Stivers and Richie Sanders. Richie was on Appropriations and Revenue in the Senate and we were able to plead our case to them. Senator Guthrie, now Congressman Guthrie, opened the doors and got us in and we told them the plight we had. At that time, they were instrumental in getting \$2 million in the state budget to supplement drug task forces. Without that, we would have had a really big crunch there. That was some of the lobbying efforts that the association did in Frankfort financially. We are really glad that now, if we want to go up there with some policy issues we can and not always have our hand out saying, 'We have to have money.' Because, financially, we are doing OK with the federal funding. And that is what we told them all along. We said, 'We hope this is a temporary measure. We don't want to have to come up here and beg for money all the time because we have some other things going on, too.'

It seems as if you would have your hands full leading this task force and serving the KNOA, but you have put so much passion into those educational efforts. Why is taking on that additional leadership role in lobbying so important for you and to officers around the state?

We all worked hard at that and we keep the e-mails flowing, sending any information out we get from the national level or sources within the state. I don't know, I just see how important having a drug task force is in the fact that I see how much more effective these guys are from all the other agencies across the hall working together than we were in my day of the state police having one guy working narcotics and Bowling Green had one guy working. Now with all of us working together, we make several major cases a year. We send probably 10 percent of our cases for federal prosecution. We have gotten rid of a lot of significant drug dealers in this community. If we can do that, anybody can do it if you work hard enough at it.

To cut the flow off, to see a unit like this disbanded, is just crazy. So I think that is probably what gave me the drive to spur it on. I see what can be done.

Is there very much information sharing that has been useful through creating the KNOA? Why is that important?

There has. I think intelligence is one of the most critical things we can get in drug investigations. There are a lot of dots to try and connect out there. There are a lot of inner workings that, a lot of times, we overlook without being able to talk to people. When you can put a face with a name and say, 'Yeah, I met him at the conference,' and call him up, there is somewhat of an instant bond. A lot of us cops, we tend to be a little paranoid and hold things close to the chest. But if you know somebody and you build a little relationship, then the information flows more freely.

What do you think are the basics that are most important to help get a drug task force established in a community?

I think the big key is that your law enforcement agencies have to get along and trust one another. We do as a community here and that is city, state and federal. That is the key to it.

Next, they have to get the funding. Which, even though things are better, there is not new funding out there for drug task forces. On the national stage, if we can get the Byrne-JAG money increased on the yearly allotment, then there will be new money to go out and start new drug task forces.

You recently were honored as a hometown hero. Tell me about that.

I was surprised by that. I'm not sure that it was deserved. I think the catalyst of that was the state police drug enforcement office gave me an award and had the media out for that. They had given me an award for the support we have been able to give them in lots of different ways in training opportunities and equipment we are able to purchase and share with them. We do that not only with the state police drug enforcement, but since we have been here, we have purchased all the K-9s for Bowling Green Police out of asset forfeitures. We have been able to send officers to specialized training out of state when they don't have it in their budget. If we have adequate asset forfeiture, we do that for all the agencies – sheriff, city and state police.

They were very gracious to do that. I'm still not sure it was deserved. I like doing this. Like I told the judge, they're going to have a hard time getting rid of me. At some point, you need to know when to retire from the police business. I already did once. I was 46 then. I hope I have enough sense to know when to really go home, but right now it is certainly not in my immediate future. J