

Officials seize large stash of illegal fireworks

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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LOWER LAKE – Two visitors to Lake County found themselves diverted to the jail early Friday morning after their vehicle was stopped and law enforcement allegedly discovered their car to be filled with drugs and illegal fireworks.

Bob Anthony Marino, 47, of Campbell and Rochelle Monique Eblen, 32, of San Jose were arrested by California Officer Steve Curtis on Friday morning, according to CHP Officer Steve Tanguay.

Tanguay said Curtis stopped Marino and Eblen for speeding shortly before 8 a.m. at Highway 29 and B Street south of Lower Lake.

When Curtis approached the vehicle he smelled marijuana, said Tanguay.

That led to a vehicle search, Tanguay said. When Curtis looked through the vehicle, he allegedly found not just marijuana but methamphetamine and 200 to 300 fireworks.

The fireworks Curtis found weren't just little bottle rockets and sparklers but mortars and other major explosives, said Kelseyville Fire Battalion Chief Joe Huggins.

Huggins estimated the cache of fireworks found was between 75 and 85 pounds. “These are flat out high explosive – the bad stuff,” he said.

CHP called Kelseyville Fire and said they had seized the fireworks, Huggins explained.

Kelseyville Fire then took the fireworks, photographed them and wrote a report, and contacted the state fire marshal, Huggins explained.

The amount of fireworks is so large that Huggins said the state fire marshal's office will send an investigator to collect the fireworks and take them back to the state offices in Sacramento.

Huggins said they had never seen such a large fireworks seizure. Tanguay added that since he came in Lake County in 2001, this was by far the biggest batch of seized fireworks he had seen.

Eblen was booked on felony charges of possession of a controlled substance and impersonating another individual, plus a misdemeanor bench warrant, possession of controlled substance paraphernalia and giving false identification to a peace officer. Her bail was set at \$25,000.

Officials booked Marino on felony charges of possession of a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance for sale, transporting a controlled substance and illegal possession of an explosive, and misdemeanor charges of selling or using unclassified fireworks and possession fireworks without a permit. His bail was set at \$15,000.

Both Eblen and Marino posted bail later in the day to gain their release from jail.

Officials weren't sure if Eblen and Marino were visiting the county or simply passing through.

With local officials concerned about dry conditions and the July 4 weekend, Huggins said, “This kind of stuff's not going to be tolerated any more.”

Eblen and Marino are scheduled to be in court next month.

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