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Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit, to identify those involved in the child pornography trade," per the release.

"The ICAC Program, created by the U.S. Department of Justice, was developed in response to the increasing number of children and teenagers using the internet, the proliferation of child pornography, and the heightened online activity by predators searching for underage victims," continued the release.

"Anyone with information about this case or any other cases of child exploitation is asked to contact the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Child Exploitation Unit at (404) 270-8870."

The Oct. 12 arrest and subsequent sexual exploitation of children charges by the Colquitt County Sheriff's Office and GBI resulted from information gathered in the course of Wrenn's Union County arrest, and Union County Sheriff's Lt. Daren Osborn believes that Wrenn could have child victims in the area.

Wrenn was arrested in Union County on Oct. 4, 2017, and Lt. Osborn learned during his investigation that Wrenn had been traveling through Union and Towns counties in the commission of his crimes.

"Back on Oct. 4, at approximately 4:46 a.m., Deputy Alan Patton and Sgt. Brandon Hogsted made a traffic stop on Georgia 515 East, a Nissan, failure to maintain lane," said Lt. Osborn. "Once

they approached the car, Deputy Patton detected a strong odor of marijuana.

"The guy admitted he had marijuana in the vehicle. In the console between the seats, they found a mason jar filled with several buds of marijuana."

A further search of the vehicle turned up even more marijuana - several pounds of it, per Lt. Osborn.

"They found a trash bag in the trunk that was full of marijuana," Lt. Osborn said. "The weight on it was right at three pounds, by what we weighed."

Other evidence discovered in an inventory of Wrenn's vehicle connected him to Colquitt County and to Clay County, North Carolina, and Lt. Osborn reached out to investigators of both counties.

"Clay County, North Carolina, investigators were very familiar with Wrenn" said Lt. Osborn. "They had arrested him several years ago for a grow house, distribution of marijuana over there."

Lt. Osborn relayed that information and evidence from Wrenn's vehicle to Colquitt County investigators, which led investigators to discover a marijuana growing operation consisting of hundreds of plants in Moultrie.

Subsequent to finding the grow house in Moultrie, investigators discovered many thousands of child porn images on Wrenn's computer, per Lt. Osborn.

"The GBI is wanting this put out everywhere in case there's any other victims involved," said Lt. Osborn. "He's been in Union County, he's been in Towns County, he's been in Clay County."

Continued Osborn: "Some people think marijuana's an okay thing. No, it's not an okay thing. It's against the law just like anything else. Look what we turned up with this."

Lt. Osborn said he would like to thank investigators with the Colquitt County Sheriff's Office and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for their assistance and hard work in bringing Wrenn's crimes to light.

Gooch...continued from Page 1A

played. "On top of that, you have your normal business needs, which continue to increase as well. People rely more and more on the internet superhighways for their day-to-day business.

"So, your businesses and your residents and your schools and hospitals, they are needing better internet service and more dependable internet service in order to take care of their needs.

"We're looking at how we can help with that to incentivize these companies, in trying to expand and offer a better service to their rural customers."

Sen. Gooch introduced a bill last year called the "Facilitating Internet Broadband Rural Expansion (FIBRE) Act," that will see some modifications this year, and he's hoping to get it passed during the current session.

"What we're trying to do is just enhance internet service for everybody in Georgia," said Gooch. "The rural areas are definitely dragging way behind on that. The cities seem to have better service because there's more demand and there's more people there, so private companies can offer that service because there's a better return on their investment.

"We don't have fiber optics to many of our businesses or our homes in rural Georgia. But in Atlanta and other metropolitan areas, it's not uncommon for people to have true fiber access to the home. I'd like to see us get to that point someday, but right now, I don't think we'll get to that point immediately.

"What we would like to do is at least raise the minimum standard of service from where we are to a more adequate level."

Many legislators expect that an announcement on infrastructure by President Donald Trump - which may have occurred after press time Monday - could herald an influx of federal assistance with rural broadband needs.

"We need to be in a position to be able to take

advantage of those funds, and apply those toward our local and state match," said Sen. Gooch. "And then get the private companies like Windstream, North Georgia Network and others to take advantage of the opportunities to expand their current infrastructure, which would help all of us up here in North Georgia."

And broadband is just one of many issues the senator anticipates tackling in the 2018 Legislative Session.

"There's going to be a lot of talk about opioid drug abuse and treatment centers," said Gooch. "And rural health care continues to be a problem. We have a crisis in our country with health care costs going up double digit increases every year.

"So, we've got to look at, since the federal government hasn't done a lot yet to try to address that, what can the state do to help ensure health care costs remain affordable, and also accessible in rural Georgia."

"Blairsville has a great hospital ran by some wonderful administrators and good doctors and nurses, and you are very lucky to have that. A lot of communities have lost their hospitals over the last seven to 10 years, and we continue to see some of those hospitals out in rural Georgia look to possibly close in the next one to two years.

"And we don't want any more of those to close in the district that I represent, nor do I want them to close in the other parts of the state. When you lose your hospital,

you lose your access to your urgent care and your ER. Then, the citizens are forced to take either an ambulance ride or a helicopter ride to the nearest trauma center."

Continued Gooch: "And if you have to take a one-hour to two-hour ride in an ambulance, sometimes you just don't have that much time left if it's a critical injury from a car accident or a heart attack, or something of that nature. So, we've got to work hard to keep these hospitals open in our rural areas."

Sen. Gooch said education is yet another area he and his fellow lawmakers will be focusing on this year.

"Education is always our No. 1 priority in the budget," said Sen. Gooch. "Fifty percent or more of the state budget goes to education. We have almost reached the point to where all the funding cuts for K-12 have been restored. I look forward to seeing that happen this year. I believe we will reach that milestone in this coming budget cycle."

"That's a big accomplishment from where we were seven years ago, when the economy was at its bottom. We were in the deep throes of the recession, and we were able to rebuild from that."

Alongside a rebounding economy and low unemployment in Union County and elsewhere, Sen. Gooch said he was excited for the opportunities that will be created with the passing of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that recently became the law of the land.

Burglaries...continued from Page 1A

Ashley Lauren Patterson, 22, of Blairsville, was also arrested as a result of the ongoing investigation, and she has been charged with one count of making false statements to an officer, per the release.

Zachary and Ashley Patterson are husband and wife, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Prior to the Patterson arrests, on Nov. 21, 2017, Towns County made two other arrests related to reported burglaries and thefts in the Woodlake Circle area of Young Harris, as well as the Bugscuffle Road area of Hiawassee, per the TCSO news release.

The two burglary suspects arrested then were Jonathon Caleb Hart, 24, and Kristy Megaha, 37, both of Young Harris, per the release.

Hart was arrested and charged with one count of burglary in the first degree, one count of burglary in the second degree and one count theft by receiving stolen property, per the release.

Megaha was arrested and charged with one count of burglary, per the release.

"The residential burglary reported on Bugscuffle Road on Nov. 21 around noon was solved very quickly due to the quick

response of (Towns County) Sheriff's Office investigators," read the release. "Most of the stolen property in that burglary was recovered by that afternoon by investigators.

"The first suspect, Caleb Hart, was also located the same day and arrested. As the investigation continued in the days that followed, the trio of Caleb Hart, Kristy Megaha and Zack Patterson were linked to additional burglaries and thefts.

"The victim of one of the burglaries was a relative to one of the suspects. Ashley Patterson, the wife of Zack Patterson, upon being questioned about the burglaries and thefts, was arrested for making false statements to investigators as to information that she provided to them."

The investigation remains active and ongoing, and additional charges are likely, according to the sheriff's office.

"The quick response and diligent police work of our detectives put an end to this group's crime spree," said Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton. "I am very pleased with the job our deputies are doing to protect the property of our citizens."

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