



RONALD K. ELKINS

COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY
WISE COUNTY/CITY OF NORTON



Chief Deputy
Commonwealth's Attorney
Adrian J. Collins

Deputy Commonwealth's Attorneys
M. Suzanne Kerney-Quillen Michael H. Abbott
Thomas W. Baker Kenneth F. Lammers, Jr.
Sarah H. Wynn

Victim/Witness Director
Vicky Wiandt
(276) 328-4421



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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JURY SENTENCES BIG STONE GAP MAN TO 40 YEARS FOR SELLING COCAINE

Willie Hamler, Jr.

Wise: On October 23, 2008, a Wise County, Va jury convicted Willie Hamler, Jr., of Big Stone Gap, Va., of distribution of cocaine. The trial lasted two days, and was prosecuted by Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Suzanne Kerney-Quillen. After deliberating for approximately an hour and a half, the jury sentenced Hamler, 49, to 40 years in prison.

The case stemmed from a June 22, 2005, undercover drug buy from Hamler conducted by agents of the Southwest Regional Narcotics Task Force. On that date, Hamler sold 0.30 grams of cocaine to a police informant working with agents of the Task Force. During the two-day trial, agents from the Task Force and the confidential informant testified about the transaction, as well as the thorough, extensive procedures utilized by the Task Force to catch drug dealers.

"I am very pleased with the outcome in this case," said Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Suzanne Kerney-Quillen. "I appreciate all the hard work of the Task Force in connection with this case and all the cases the agency handles. Removing drug dealers from our communities is a very high priority in our office," she concluded.

"This will certainly be a deterrent to others who choose to sell illegal drugs in Wise County," said Commonwealth's Attorney Ron Elkins. "This case stemmed from the Street Sweeper Operations we have been working on for almost 3 years now. We are pleased with the verdict. The Southwest Narcotics Task Force did a great job with this case, and Suzanne did a wonderful job presenting it to the jury. I believe the jury sent a strong message about the way Wise County citizens feel about drug dealers."