

Evidence of drug use grows in Smithtown's parks

October 3, 2009 by STACEY ALTHERR / stacey.altherr@newsday.com



At Brady Park in Smithtown, town park ranger Thomas Lohmann headed past the manicured ballfields and into the woods. About 100 yards in, as the path goes over a wooden walkway, he pointed down to an inscription that someone has scrawled with black marker: "Buns All Day," a reference to bundles, or 10 bags of heroin.

A little further along was a hangout, where among the debris was a homemade bong used to smoke drugs, fashioned from a green soda bottle. Lohmann said the rangers found needles here, too.

Heroin was the last thing on the minds of Smithtown's unarmed park rangers and public safety officers just a few years ago. They're better known for chasing people out of the public areas after dusk.

But now they have found heroin even in cars outside youth baseball games, along with evidence of its use elsewhere. The rangers under public safety Chief [John Valentine](#) now work plainclothes sometimes, have an unmarked car, coordinate with the county's heroin task force and share information with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

"I know our place," said Lohmann of his position in relation to the task force. "If I can get anything to help them, great."

One early evening last summer, when the rangers allowed a reporter along for a patrol, Lohmann sat in the unmarked car peering through binoculars at four teenagers outside the restrooms at Hills Park on Fifty Acre Road. A few days earlier, a resident called to complain that kids may be dealing drugs there. Right behind the bathrooms, a softball game is going on.

The four boys outside the bathroom eventually left, so Lohmann and his partner took off to check another park.

"It's in the middle of a nice neighborhood, too," said Lohmann, who grew up in Smithtown. "We recently found needles at [[Kings Park](#)] bluff. People don't care. They just want to party."

Around 6 p.m. that day, as their unmarked car rolled down a residential street, Lohmann's partner, a part-time ranger who didn't want to be identified, pointed to a young man sitting on a stoop. "We arrested him with 77 pills," he said.

That arrest was made at Veterans Memorial Park in April 2008 in [St. James](#), about the time that the rangers started to work in plain clothes.

Before they got to the next park, Lohmann observed a silver Acura pass by. He made a quick right turn to follow him. The driver's a known drug dealer, Lohmann said, and recently got out of jail. He followed him for a while and made plans to look for him later.

At Flynn Memorial Park in [Kings Park](#), Lohmann said that just a few weeks earlier, public safety officers arrested three kids who were smoking marijuana. Heroin was found in their car. His partner said it happened at 4:30 p.m., while the ballfields were still filled with kids and parents.

But on this summer night it was quiet. Lohmann remarked that a young man overdosed at Gibbs Pond Park in [Nesconset](#) in October.

Soon after leaving Flynn Memorial, Lohmann came upon a car whose driver has been seen with known dealers, he said. The driver sped up, and the officers pulled him over.

Both officers said the car smelled of marijuana. The driver, a 17-year-old, in jeans and a zippered sweatjacket, appeared nonplused and consented to a search, taking off his shoes and lowering his pants. The rangers noticed what they believed were fresh needle marks on the inside of both his arms, but the young man said he got the marks while playing sports.

After finding both the car and driver clean, they let him go. He was seen moments later near a 7-Eleven in [St. James](#) with a passenger, a stretch of road where kids often hang out.

The officer called the [Suffolk](#) County's heroin task force to relay the information about the traffic stop. Said Lohmann: "We'll see him again."

The teenager now is in rehab, Lohmann said.