



**CLINT EASTWOOD PLAYED A BOUNTY HUNTER IN FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE (1965).**

form are Kentucky, Illinois, Oregon, and Washington D.C. Collectively, bounty hunters catch an estimated 31,500 bail jumpers per year, about 90 percent of which are fugitives on the lam. The Professional Bail Agents of the United States estimates that 15,500 people make their livings as bail bondmen.

G.R. Hester, 63, is a professional bounty hunter who grew up as a ranch cowboy in Amarillo, Texas. He has a knack for finding people who don't want to be found and took up bounty hunting after moving to Wichita Falls, Texas, in the 1980s.

Hester and his team recently found one of Texoma's (Texas and Oklahoma) most wanted criminals when they spotted the methamphetamine trafficker in a known Wichita Falls drug house. After also sighting three large men in the house, Hester decided it was better to use brains, not brawn, and wait for the suspect to emerge. When she finally did, it was tricky to identify her to make the apprehension.

"She came out disguised as a guy, wearing glasses and a Washington Redskins jacket," he says.

Despite taking precautions, such as using backup and notifying law enforcement, bounty hunting is still a risky job. "I've got a hole through my left lung that doctors said missed my heart by a quarter of an inch," he says. "I'm all scarred up on my whole left side, because most people are right-handed. I've had stitches in my biceps. But I'm pretty sharp. I don't get in too much trouble. In 29 years, all I've had is a hole in my lung and some scars, and that's not too bad."

Hester has developed many connections in law enforcement over nearly three decades in the business, and often asks for backup from U.S. Marshals, police, or county sheriff departments.

Workshop

# Get your man

Bounty hunting is DIY law enforcement with an Old West twist. *By Sean Chaffin*



**Bio ▶** G.R. Hester, 63, a bounty hunter based in Wichita Falls, Texas. Raised in Amarillo, he worked on ranches before realizing he had a knack for finding people. "They ask me what G.R. stands for," he says. "And I say Mr. Get Ready."

For more than a century, American bounty hunters have returned fugitives to face justice. It's a demanding job that was upheld by an 1873 Supreme Court decision that grants broad rights to a person who provides bail for someone accused of a crime.

Today most bounty hunters are employed by bail bondsmen and are paid a percentage of the bail money put up by the fugitive. A bounty hunter's authority varies by state, but in general, he or she is a private citizen who has authority to enter a bonded person's home and request assistance from law enforcement if he knows a fugitive's location.

Many states require bounty hunters to be licensed peace officers, security officers, private investigators, or—in Texas, Connecticut, Arizona, California, Iowa, and Louisiana—actual bounty hunters. Some states, like Alaska and Alabama, grant wide latitude to bondsmen and/or private citizens to arrest fugitives, but Louisiana, for instance, requires bounty hunters to wear special clothing that identifies them. The only states or jurisdictions to completely ban the profession in any

## Investigate the profession

- ▶ **The National Association of Fugitive Recovery Agents** helps set industry standards, hosts national conferences, and offers apprenticeship assistance. [fugitive-recovery.org](http://fugitive-recovery.org)
- ▶ **Professional Bail Agents of the United States** provides information, education, and representation for bail agents nationwide. [pbus.com](http://pbus.com)
- ▶ **The Fugitive Recovery Network** provides professional services relating to bail enforcement, fugitive apprehension, bail bondsmen, bounty hunters, private investigators, surety

- companies, and skip tracer agents. It's also a good resource for state laws regarding bounty hunting. [fugitiverecovery.com](http://fugitiverecovery.com)
- ▶ **The American Bail Coalition** advocates for a more effective public/private sector partnership for a more responsible method of releasing defendants prior to trial. [americanbailcoalition.com](http://americanbailcoalition.com)
- ▶ Bounty-hunter-turned-reality-show-star Duane "Dog" Chapman's autobiography, **You Can Run, but You Can't Hide** (Hyperion, 2007), details his life. [dogthebountyhunter.com](http://dogthebountyhunter.com)