

Drug snitches sing to save skins

By CRAIG PIECHURA

When a narcotics officer uses the word "do," he isn't talking about your hair style.

Normally, the word "do" means take action. But, to a narcotics officer, "do" means making an arrest. And when narcotics officers talk about the worth of an informant, they talk about how many people that informant can "do."

"We might pick a guy up for dealing a relatively small amount, or he's referred to us by the detectives after being picked up for a string of B&E's," explained Lt. Alfred Laatz, chief of the Wayne County Sheriff's Metro Squad. "A lot of them say right off, 'I don't want to go to jail, I want to help myself.' That's the term they use."

"So, we say to them, 'Who can you do?' If he agrees to work with us, we'll still secure a warrant on him so we have a hammer if he gets cold feet later on in the game."

"Contrary to many people's preconceived notion, the police get the best of the arrangement between narc and snitch. An informant is only useful as long as he's producing solid information or introducing undercover cops to high-level dealers."

IF HE PERFORMS his job well, the informant may get charges against

him dropped or reduced, or he'll be given probation after his conviction, according to Laatz.

The judge, not the police department, makes that determination, Laatz added.

"The court makes us establish an informant's reliability," Laatz said. "Otherwise we could run rampant and finger anybody by saying an informant provided the information. But, if we prove that the person is providing us with reliable information, the judge is usually pretty cooperative."

Not just anyone can decide to become an informant, according to Laatz. Only those charged in non-violent crimes—like breaking and entering or sale of small amounts of drugs—are given a chance to negotiate a plea or are paid for information.

And Laatz says, it is "strictly verboten" for a narcotics officer to hand over guns or drugs to an informant.

Some of the demands informants make on the police are surprising, Laatz said.

Many are disappointed they can't sample the pick of confiscated drugs. Others try without success to obtain new identities or get a handgun from the department for "protection."

IF THOSE goodies are prohibited, then what's in it for the informant?

Parking plan prodded to ease Metro squeeze

Wayne County Commissioner Thomas Presnell, head of a task force formed to deal with the Metropolitan Airport parking problem, has called for full report on plans for increased parking at the airport.

Presnell, who proposed the task force, asked the County Road Commission which operates the facility, to submit a comprehensive report by May 15.

Presnell (D-Westland) said the report is the first step in implementing his resolution requesting that the possibility of providing temporary satellite parking areas for air travelers during the Christmas-Easter travel crunch be studied. He suggested that shuttle bus service be provided from the parking areas which could be located on public or private property.

"We need to know what is being done to prevent a recurrence of the traffic jams which choked the airport last Christmas and Easter," Presnell said.

"For instance," he said, "last December, the sheriff's department ticketed 300 improperly parked cars and ordered 30 cars towed away in just one night. This occurred 'after' the airport opened an additional 1,000-space employees' parking lot to the public."

"The situation is not going to get any better when you consider the increase in low-budget flights and government predictions that by the end of the century the number of air passengers arriving and leaving Metro could climb to 33 million per year."

Up to \$250, depending on the amount of drugs involved, or the risk taken by the informant.

Once an informant starts introducing narcotics officers to dealers or making drug buys under surveillance, he becomes a "special employee." Although not on the weekly payroll, informants are issued Wayne County payroll checks when they come through for the police.

Those attracted to inform out of revenge aren't used, says Laatz, because revenge clouds their perception.

"Generally we won't work with them," Laatz said. "You have to be very careful because emotions are involved. They may not be entirely truthful. They just want to get back at the guy because he doesn't like the way he's treating his sister or maybe he owes him money. We can't have that."

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