

# Adult use: discreet, on the wane

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

A society of unwritten rules, utmost discretion and a shared element of adrenaline-pumping risk — that's the tale of the adult illicit drug scene in Oakland County suburbs, as told by a variety of observers and users.

"It's everywhere," echo narcotic officers and recovering users, citing marijuana and cocaine as the drugs of choice here.

Try to purchase cocaine or marijuana in the bars along Woodward Avenue or in clubs in Southfield and the Bloomfields. Chances are, if you're inexperienced in the drug subculture, new on the scene and alone, you're apt to come up empty-handed.

The beefed-up war on drugs, aimed with equal force at dealers and users alike; tough no-plea bargaining policies by the Oakland County prosecutor; new corporate drug testing; and changing attitudes have combined to push the drug scene into a cautious, paranoid existence.

"It's a tight circle and hard to penetrate," said an Oakland County businessman, a self-described former flower child of the 1960s who, in the years since, has successfully used marijuana, psychedelics, speed and cocaine.

A 39-YEAR-OLD Southfield professional from a well-known family is perhaps typical. Until recently, he used cocaine weekly, purchasing three-gram amounts he cut into one-gram packages, selling two and retaining one for personal use.

"When my supplier was arrested, I couldn't find a replacement. Of course, I had to be extra careful and keep a very low profile," he said, for fear of being recognized. Only in utter desperation would he consider buying from crack houses or street dealers in Detroit.

In response to toughening police crackdowns, a 35-year-old Troy man, who first dealt drugs while attending Birmingham's Seaborn High School, switched from cocaine to alcohol as his drug of choice, primarily because the latter is legal and consequences for use are far less severe.

"We have one of the toughest policies in the nation," according to Oakland County prosecutor Richard Thompson. "We do not plea bargain. The only exception — there have been seven in 10 years — is going up the ladder after a major dealer."

A Northwest pilot based in metro Detroit, said he has reluctantly quit smoking an occasional marijuana joint due to drug testing now required twice-annually of all flight crew members. He is also subject to random testing.

Chasing attitudes are playing a role as well. Americans are becoming more health conscious and, unless yesterday's when drugs were considered cool by many, adult use is increasingly considered "unhip."

"IT'S A GENERATIONAL thing," according to one longtime Southfield cocaine user, now 43. "Baby boomers went into the (drug) phase, went through it and outgrew it."

Whatever the reasons, the secrecy surrounding illicit drugs creates at least an illusion of decreased use. Fewer narcotic-related arrests by local police and more participants in drug rehab programs seem to support the premise.

With the notable exceptions of Troy and the Farmingtons, drug related arrests in most southern Oakland County suburbs are down. In Rochester Hills, for example, arrests by Rochester Hills police dropped by half, from 31 in 1988 to 15 in 1989.

Increased arrests in Troy and the Farmingtons are attributed to increased police efforts directed at drug-related crimes, not necessarily more drug-related crime, according to area officers and annual police reports.

Simultaneously, enrollment is up in drug rehab programs. Membership in Narcotics Anonymous is expected to nearly double this year, according to a member of the fellowship's Oakland County-based public information committee who, in beating a drug habit of 23 years, has attended daily meetings for three years. Over 500 such meetings of five to 300 persons occur each week in a five-county area.

Maple Grove, a treatment center in West Bloomfield for substance abusers, has streamlined evaluations to meet increasing numbers of patients. A new outpatient program is designed specifically for cocaine users.

"DRUGS ARE DEFINITELY down now from several years ago and they're also less here than on the (west) coast," according to a 28-year-old bartender from Troy who occasionally uses various illicit drugs. Her observations are based on seven years of tending bar in Oakland County, Texas and California, including an earlier stint here with a boss who encouraged "turning cus-

tomers on" to cocaine. She has also worked with bartenders who dealt drugs on the side.

Cocaine is easy to spot, she said, citing clenched jaws, grinding teeth and nervous hand and foot movements as dead giveaways. Regular users also experience runny noses and eyes, often explained away as allergies or ill-fitting contact lenses.

A 43-year-old amateur baseball player tells how he and teammates once celebrated weekly league play by retiring to a nearby bar and ordering drinks and lines of cocaine. "The cocktail waitress was a coke head. She delivered on request."

Such blatant public behavior is no longer tolerated.

"If we see someone looking like they're doing drugs on the premises," said the bartender of a Royal Oak establishment near Birmingham's border, "we holler and embarrass them. We eject them too." Still, the bar reportedly uses an Oakland County attorney to finger narc agents.

A standard joke making the rounds: the most blatant use of illegal drugs in Oakland County today is Wednesday, arraignment day, in the bathrooms of circuit court. All you hear from behind stall doors is sniffing and toilets flushing.

OTHERS CONTENT suburban drug use is as

plentiful as ever, carefully secreted by savvy suburbanites with enough cash to shield themselves from publicity or arrest. They prefer purchasing in large quantities, reducing the risk of frequent buys, and buying directly from dealers, eliminating middlemen or couriers who pose additional risks.

Nor do they party publicly. If used at parties or in other social settings, users discreetly excuse themselves to the privacy of a bedroom or bathroom, car or parking lot.

"People with money can afford to isolate themselves. They buy big quantities, they buy less often and they don't have to resell to afford their own habit," said one user who, judging by the condition of his clothes, home and office, is short of cash.

A gram of cocaine can currently be purchased for around \$110. A pound of marijuana costs \$1,000 to \$1400. Exotic brands can cost up to \$4,000 a pound, according to a 35-year-old major marijuana supplier recently released from federal prison for his part in a 1986 drug ring that involved former classmates from an area Catholic high school.

His opinion of the war on drugs: "We're scaring a few people and people are being more careful, but if you're going to use, you're going to use."

## Who, me quit? Why?

By Philip A. Sherman  
staff writer

Andy is a successful writer who lives in Oakland County.

He was graduated from college with honors. He is well-read and has several favorite authors, Dostoevsky prominent among them. He loves jazz. He started smoking marijuana when he was 18, and has continued to do so for the past two decades.

"I worry about kids doing drugs," Andy said. "Andy is representative of the other end of the drug spectrum not often written or talked about today."

National and local governmental bodies, schools, law enforcement agencies, rehabilitation centers and drug counselors have painted, with good intentions and a broad brush, the profile of a person who uses drugs: a desperate loser, an irresponsible, troubled soul; a good person helplessly turned to the dark side who awakens at 2 a.m. in a cold sweat and prays for the strength to shake his habit.

"That profile may be true in many cases, but it's left no room for someone like Andy."

"I consider myself the designated driver" when he's out with friends, Andy said. "And no, I don't get stoned and drive. Moderation is the key." While he has a taste for some liquors, he doesn't drink alcoholic beverages — "a bottle can last for months" in his house, he said. "I'm more worried about how people make alcohol seem safe... or cigarettes."

AS FAR AS other drugs go, Andy said he's experimented with them all, except crack, but now only smokes marijuana.

"I think coke is a terrible drug that is physically dangerous and psychologically addicting. It only took three or four times to figure that out."

"That (cocaine) is the devil's drug. It makes you feel good and potent, and it's the exact opposite. Robin Williams had a good line about cocaine. He said, 'It makes me horny and impotent at the same time — gee, I've gotta get more of this.'"

Andy has won awards for his writing, does not smoke when he writes, and, frequently, does not smoke.

"Sometimes (I don't smoke marijuana) for a couple of months; sometimes, several times in a week. But never when I'm working, and there's a difference between getting buzzed and stoned."

"Stoned," in his mind, is the equivalent of sitting down with a six pack and finishing it within two hours. I can't remember the last time I was stoned," he said.

As he has grown older, Andy, who once would have classed himself as a "knee-jerk liberal," is now "far more conservative than I used to be. I'm a cautious left-winger who understands certain conservative economic arguments." His vantage point as an adult also has helped him define what he has concluded is the real problem with America's drug war.

"I GREW UP seeing drugs as an awful thing, but my politics were to the left. (For that reason) I was constantly being accused of taking drugs, even though I wasn't."

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— Andy  
writer

"I thought, 'If that's why they think drugs are really that bad, then maybe they aren't.' They saw drugs as anti-war. Too many people I knew hadn't turned into ravenous fiends when they smoked marijuana and it became hard to believe the authority figures. The same holds true today. Most kids know pot is not a deadly, horrible, evil drug," Andy said.

Dangerous, in Andy's mind and not in a trivial sense, are alcohol, cigarettes and commercial television. While he admits to watching "L.A. Law" and "thirtysomething," Andy thinks "television is the dangerous drug. It causes the mind to stop functioning to its full degree. It takes time away from reading."

Danger also lies in lumping all drugs into one equally deadly category, according to Andy. "When lumped in the same breath, they (the authority figures) may in fact be mitigating the value of their own message."

ANOTHER PROBLEM Andy sees is the way drugs are obtained today.

"The purchase puts you in contact with illegal," salespeople and "opens you to exposure of other things (with which you might not ordinarily come into contact, thus creating an opportunity to buy something like crack). They'll sell you anything. I don't like having to associate with who I have to associate with to get marijuana. I'd rather be paying significant taxes" and purchasing it legally, Andy said.

He is very careful about letting friends and/or colleagues know he smokes marijuana.

"Just hinting that I do smoke could have the Gestapo raid my house," he said, but he added that that particular fear isn't what makes people, at least in his peer group, stop smoking.

Instead, he's found that some of the adults he knows quit smoking marijuana because they were afraid their children might mention that fact in school. Others quit because of peer pressure; some stopped because of drug testing at their offices. Still others, like Andy, continue to smoke.

And he will continue to smoke. When asked if he felt any sort of pressing need to stop, he said, "No. Why?"

## Courier in tent homes

ing to be there.

"They search you at the door to see if you're carrying a gun or wearing a wire. I'm very uncomfortable. A lot of the time the people there don't want to see the person bringing the stuff or me to see I have."

"I think they think of me as some low life. I do my thing and they want nothing more to do with me. They pay me cash for the delivery, and I get a tip, then I leave."

JADE ISN'T AFRAID of getting caught because she doesn't believe she'll ever be sent to jail. She never feels she's in danger. "I see guns when I make a delivery, but I'm not afraid. The places I go are usually nice."

Maybe if I were running around Wayne County I'd be more scared to be arrested. Detroit's another world, the same substance but a really different world. Up here my clients are people who just happen to have a hunger for something they shouldn't."

Jade thinks she may be able to slip away before she gets caught. "I guess I know I'll eventually be arrested and that it's going to be to an end."

"I don't think I'll ever do jail time. I strongly don't believe in prison. I just cannot imagine a life sending me to jail. Chances are I would have to get out of it. When it comes to going to jail, you have to narc."

JADE'S SUSPECTED by certain law enforcement officers and

DAN DEAN/staff photographer

ment among area teenagers. The graffiti, which sometimes

maintains a strange adversarial friendship with them, according to Jade. But they've never caught her at the right time.

"I've been able to obtain a small amount of knowledge of how they operate which has helped me out immensely," she said smiling. Primarily, she's in it for the money and has been for three years. It's also a game she enjoys much of the time, like playing cat and mouse with the police. And like consenting to be interviewed for this article.

Another part of the game is maintaining a modest lifestyle. She's shunning away most of her drug money for a future time and place when it's safe to spend it.

Jade got a regular job "so I could live income tax. I could be up shit's creek if I didn't have a job."

"I don't make much money at it, but as it's turned out I like my job. I drive an inexpensive car, and deliberately don't pay my bills on time. I have a terrible credit rating. A bank would never give me a loan."

She led a clean life and was a good student in high school. It was a boyfriend who got her involved in the drug business. At one time she was a user, but no more. "In fact, part of the requirements of my (drug delivery) jobs is that I don't do drugs."

"I JUST HAD an opportunity to make cash and I took it." Her parents don't have any idea what she's doing and she hopes they never find out.

She has some regrets about not going to college and thinks she may go "when all this is over."

In order to do what she does successfully, she said, "You've got to be smart, have a good sense of humor and you have to be a little bit psychic. If you don't feel that something's right you turn your car around and go home."

## Drug effects tied to chemistry, personality

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

A cocaine user believes he can do anything.

"You can run for miles and have sex for eight hours," said Dennis Lippert, a chemist in the Michigan State Police Forensic Laboratory in Sterling Heights. "It's a powerful stimulant, an upper."

Psychotic or violent behavior can identify the crack cocaine user. The "munchies" will grip the marijuana user. A heroin user will nod off in a corner.

Despite the characterizations, drugs affect each person differently. The drug that will grab on and get under your skin may not have quite that same effect on someone else. It depends on a person's physiological and psychological makeup, as well as his personality.

Cocaine, for example, can be lethal to some people in doses of an estimated minimum of 1.2 grams.

A regular aspirin is a half-gram. Some people have died from three one-hundredths of a gram of cocaine. But some cocaine addicts can tolerate up to five grams a day, Lippert said.

The white powdered cocaine can pump up a person just like the body's adrenaline. The effect is short-lived. Cocaine "is a very psychologically tenuous drug." The mind says you need it and you just have to get to experience the stimulating feeling again, fellow lab chemist John Siefert said.

EUPHORIA, FEELINGS of increased energy and increased mental alertness are among cocaine's effects. It also dispels the need for food or sleep. That's a reason why many use the drug, particularly to diet.

"It affects the hypothalamus. A lot of models, for example, are into cocaine just for the appetite effects," Lippert said.

Heavy users will get an intensified high, but it could lead to bizarre behavior. The person's heartbeat begins to race, the blood pressure rises and breathing becomes faster. It also constricts the blood vessels and main arteries, making them work harder.

"I'm really surprised we're not seeing more heart attacks," Ralph Sochocki said.

When cocaine is snorted, it irritates the nose and eventually destroys the nasal passages. That's why users always have stuffed or runny noses and red, dry skin around their noses. Snoring cocaine can eventually wear a hole in the nasal septum.

Smoking crack, the rock form of cocaine, will provide an incredibly intense high. The drug, in a short time, becomes physically addictive. The intense euphoria is followed by a crash or depression. The higher the high, the lower the low.

IT'S THAT desperate feeling to

get out of the low, depressing state of mind that leads to the desire for more.

Besides a physical and psychological addiction, cocaine also has a psychotic reaction," Lippert said.

Heroin has historically been considered "the end of the line drug." Crack is now in its class. Crack so (easily) becomes a part of the user's life that nothing is as important as achieving that euphoric high again and again.

"It's called chasing the ghost. The first or second time you do it, you get such a high. From then on, you always try to reach that high again. But you can never reach it again. So you try all the more and more," Lippert said.

Marijuana, commonly called grass or weed, produces a mellow feeling in many users. But it can have a varied effect depending on personality. "It's a disinhibitor," Sochocki said. In some, the drug acts as a depressant, in others a hallucinogen.

Generally smoked, marijuana will make most users feel a euphoric high accompanied by a need to talk and laugh more than usual, similar to mild alcohol intoxication.

Users also will feel the "munchies," the need to eat, as hypoglycemia begins. The user will often have reddened eyes and dilated pupils. As the drug wears off within a few hours, the user becomes quiet and sleepy.

HEROIN, A synthetic drug made from morphine, which is made from opium, is a depressant. The milder form is codeine found in many cough syrups and pain relievers.

Immediately, the heroin user will feel a sense of pleasure when the drug stimulates portions of the brain. That's followed by gratification where the need for food, for example, doesn't intrude. At higher doses, the heroin user begins to nod off into a drowsy state.

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— Dennis Lippert  
State Forensic Lab