

Oakland grand jury indicts 15 in county's largest crack ring

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

The grand jury has indicted 15 people thus "destroying the largest crack cocaine" ring in Oakland County history, according to prosecutor Richard Thompson.

The 15 people were part of a sophisticated network that sold crack cocaine three shifts a day, seven days a week for six years, the prosecutor said Wednesday during a press conference. Annual sales are estimated at \$1.5 million, he said.

"There may be bigger operations

involving powdered cocaine," Thompson said. "But this is the biggest crack cocaine operation we've encountered."

The 15 were indicted Monday and arrested Tuesday, Thompson said. They were to be arraigned in Oakland Circuit Court.

THOMPSON SAID those arrested had various jobs within the drug operation. Some were leaders, or supervisors, while others were telephone operators or runners, he said. Thirteen of the 15 are being charged with conspiring to deliver in

excess of 650 grams of a mixture containing cocaine, a controlled substance, Thompson said. The mandatory penalty upon conviction is life in prison.

Two of those indicted have agreed to cooperate with investigators, Thompson said. Each is charged with a less serious offense and could be sentenced to 1 to 20 years in prison upon conviction, he said.

Police also seized nine firearms, nine vehicles — including a 1989 van with gold plating — and jewelry and electronic appliances valued at \$50,000, Thompson said.

Although the operation undoubtedly sold crack to suburban customers its major operation was within the city of Pontiac, the prosecutor said. All 15 are residents of the city, he said.

The indictments and arrests are the result of a cooperative effort by vice squad of the Pontiac Police Department, the Special Investigations Unit of the Michigan State Police and the grand jury, Thompson said.

POLICE KNEW the organization existed and previously arrested some of the individuals involved, Thompson said. "But they were unable to get enough proof to seek criminal warrants until they went to the grand jury," he said.

The grand jury is empowered to

grant immunity to witnesses in order to compel them to testify, Thompson said. That enabled investigators to compel runners, or others arrested, to testify against their suppliers, he said.

At least one of those arrested is wanted in connection with a 1988 murder in Miami, Fla., Thompson said.

The Pontiac defendants were believed to have been getting their cocaine from Florida until that time, Thompson said. "But after that shooting, they switched sources and started getting it from Detroit."

If the defendant wanted in connection with the shooting is extradited as expected, Thompson said investigators in Florida hope his prosecution will lead to additional arrests.

"This investigation is definitely not over," he said.

THE ARRESTS brings the total number of people prosecuted under the grand jury to 30 since it was formed in September to investigate narcotics operations and unsolved murders.

"If the drug kingpins in Oakland County have not yet understood my message, let me make it clear," Thompson said. "Our mission is to destroy every major drug dealing operation in this county."

Music, art, dance on stage at OCC

The February schedule for the Smith Theatre on the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College focuses on music and art.

• 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 2 — The Detroit Chamber Winds, comprised of professional musicians from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and the Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestra, perform a concert.

The concert features Mozart's "Serenade No. 12," Stravinsky's "Ritmo Jondo," Tchaikovsky's "Valse" and "Octet" by Beethoven.

Tickets are \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door. An optional dinner theater package is available for \$22.

• 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 8 — The Womencenter Art Show opens with a reception in the theater gallery.

The show continues through Feb. 23 and is open to the public.

• 8 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 14 — The East Street Touring Company presents a "Coke Porter Review." Tickets for the cabaret-style show are \$8 in advance or \$10 at the door. An optional dinner package is available at \$20. Paid reservations must be made a week ahead.

• 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 23 — A dance concert to conclude the Womencenter Art Show featuring Alana Barter, a Walled Lake resident, in "Transformations Face to Face." Tickets are \$8, \$5 for students and senior citizens.

For more information, call 471-7700. The Orchard Ridge campus is at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, near the intersection of I-696 in Farmington Hills.

Residents advise on seniors

Area residents are among the 11 people appointed to the Senior Citizens Service Providers Forum that advises County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

The appointees include: • Carol L. Marsh of Birmingham, to the Birmingham Area Seniors Coordinating Council and Center.

• Victoria L. Yost, Southfield, to the City of Southfield Senior Adult Center.

• Miriam Sandweiss, Birmingham, to the Jewish Community Center of Metro Detroit.

• Elaine McDermott, Southfield, to Marian, Oakland-West.

• Marye Miller, Rochester, to the Older Persons' Commission.

• Ann McCarter, Waterford, to Mature Mingle-West Bloomfield.

• Deborah L. Bower, Union Lake, to Highland Township Senior Center.

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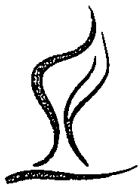
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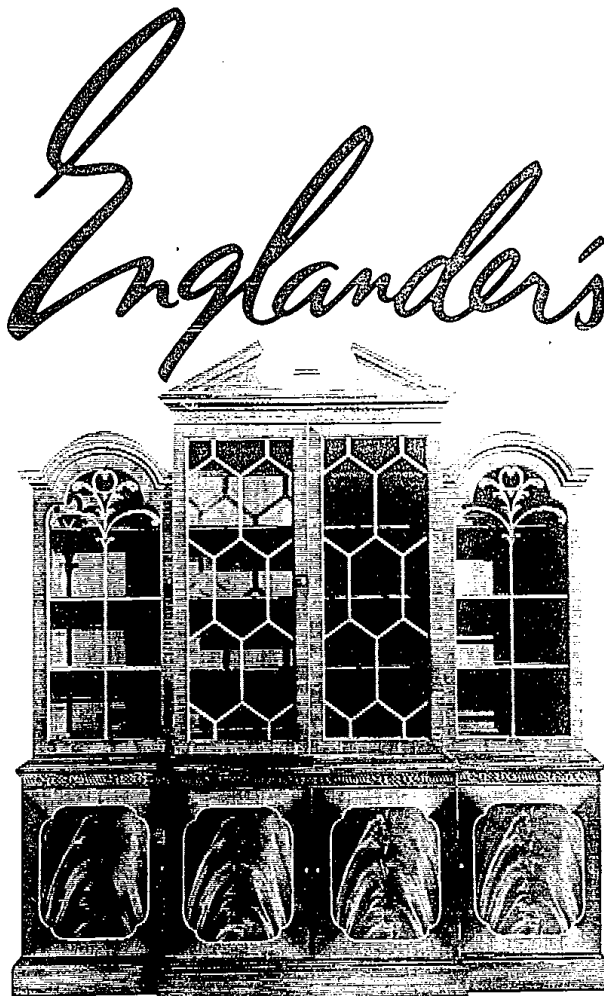
Nomination forms are available where you volunteer and at the catalog desks of JCPenney stores.

Deadline for nominations is March 20, 1990.

Winners will be announced April 24, 1990.

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