

AUTHORITIES: CRACK RING EMPLOYED 275

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, March 2, 1988
Author: JOCELYNE ZABLIT Free Press Staff Writer

A drug ring that at its peak sold up to \$3 million worth of cocaine a day and controlled 50 percent of the crack houses in Detroit has been smashed with the indictment of 22 people by a federal grand jury, authorities said Tuesday.

The ring is described in the indictment as the **Chambers Brothers** Group, so named for the five brothers who allegedly controlled it. Authorities said the group had 275 employees, many under age 16, and operated up to 200 crack houses while supplying cocaine to 500 more.

The indictment charges the group with involvement in at least four drug-related homicides and, in one instance last December, with manufacturing and selling crack cocaine at a house across the street from an elementary school on Detroit's east side.

"This is the most significant case that I have ever seen come down in this judicial district in terms of the impact on the community," William Coonce, special agent in charge of the Detroit office of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, said at a news conference. "Hopefully, this will be a message to the kids out there that this is what is going to happen to you despite the fact that you can make these kinds of profits."

He said that since the group began operating in Detroit in 1983, led by Billy Joe and Larry Chambers, federal officials have served them with 107 search warrants and seized 250 weapons, \$500,000 in cash, \$500,000 worth of jewelry and 41 cars including Jeeps, Cadillacs and Mercedes-Benzes.

The **Chambers brothers** also are believed to own property in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, and in their hometown of Marianna, Ark., from where they would transport juveniles to work for them in Detroit, Coonce said.

The indictment alleges that female juveniles controlled the "cook houses" and "cut houses" where cocaine was manufactured into crack and packaged before distribution.

In its heyday in mid-1987, the organization purchased five to 10 kilograms of cocaine every two days and sold it for an \$80,000 profit, Coonce said. He said the 200 crack houses the **Chambers brothers** operated each grossed up to \$15,000 a day.

U.S. Attorney Roy Hayes said: "The crack houses were set up to compete with one another to increase the demand to encourage sales and eliminate competition."

The group also had established an enforcement unit that would kidnap, threaten, assault and, in four known cases, kill victims, Hayes said.

The indictment also charges that in December 1987, one defendant, Charles Rhoades, manufactured and sold crack cocaine within 1,000 feet of Goodale Elementary School.

Detroit Police Chief William Hart, whose department was part of a federal, state and local task force created in 1986 to investigate the Chambers organization, said the elimination of the group should curb the supply of drugs in the city.

"I think this will have a great impact because now they see that we have a co-operative effort that means business," he said. "You're working on the real cause of the problem if you can put these people that supply (the crack houses) in jail."

Hayes said seven of the 22 defendants, including four of the **Chambers brothers**, were in custody Tuesday and the rest are sought.

If convicted on the count of conspiracy with intent to distribute controlled substances, all the defendants face up to 20 years in prison. Billy Joe and Larry Chambers face a maximum of life imprisonment if convicted of running the operation.

Named in the indictment and in custody Tuesday were Billy Joe, Larry, Willie Lee and Otis Bernard Chambers, Eric Lamar Wilkins, Elaine Lucas and Roderick Jerome Byrd, all of Detroit.

Memo: SEE ALSO METRO FINAL EDITION page 1A

Edition: METRO EDITION

Section: NWS

Page: 1A;

Index Terms: DRUG ; HOMICIDE ; DETROIT ; JUVENILE ; MULTIPLE

Record Number: 8801100575

Copyright (c) 1988 Detroit Free Press