

WITNESS TESTIFIES: DRUG RING BEAT ITS TROOPS

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A leader of what federal investigators call a major Detroit drug gang kept his young troops in line with brutality and intimidation that included clubbing one youth with a chair leg and pushing another out a third story window, witness Patricia Middleton testified Thursday.

Middleton, 33, of LaPorte, Ind., was the lead witness at the U.S. District Court trial of 14 people that prosecutors say were part of the **Chambers Brothers** drug organization.

Middleton, who often broke into tears during her testimony, admitted she worked for the **Chambers Brothers** for six months in 1986 as a money courier. Middleton said she was coerced into the job by one of the brothers who threatened to harm her boyfriend, manager of an east side apartment building the Chambers used for their crack cocaine business.

She said the youth who she saw clubbed by Larry (Mario) Chambers was a multiple sclerosis victim who had difficulty walking. The youth was punished for selling soap powder as crack to unsuspecting buyers, according to Middleton.

She said Chambers hit the boy "about 10 times" on the shoulder and legs "and said it would teach all of us not to sell" soap.

Middleton, who received immunity from prosecution in exchange for her testimony, said the youth who was thrown out of the window was being punished for the same reason. She said that on another occasion she heard a gunshot and saw defendant Eric (Fats) Wilkins and another man carry a body out of the apartment house and put it in a trash bin.

Another time, Wilkins stood laughing with a bloody baseball bat at his side after he had joined in the beating of another youth who was missing money from drug sales, Middleton said.

Her testimony, due to resume today, provided the first detailed glimpse of the Chambers' alleged methods of discipline.

In his opening statement, U.S. Attorney Roy Hayes said the case "will develop into a tale of two cities: Marianna, Ark. and Detroit. It was the best of times and it was the worst of times."

Hayes told the jury that the **Chambers brothers** -- Larry, Otis, Billy Joe and Willie -- brought poor young people from their native Arkansas to Detroit to work in the crack trade. He said the ring flourished on the strength of its recruiting, organization and discipline.

He said employees were charged \$100 for failing to follow instructions, \$300 for stealing money and \$500 for revealing secrets or bringing strangers into crack houses.

Defense lawyers attacked the credibility of some of the 170 prospective government witnesses.

"You will hear testimony from witnesses who are not reliable, witnesses who don't follow the law . . . witnesses who have criminal problems," said Larry Chambers' attorney, Anthony Chambers, who is no relation to him.

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