

DRUG SUSPECT LIVED A LIFE OF FLASH AND CASH - U.S.: DETROIT MAN WAS TOP COKE DEALER

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Federal officials say **Marcus Mitchell** liked fine cars, flashy jewelry and prime real estate.

They say Mitchell, 34, of Detroit and Avondale, Ariz., acquired those toys as one of Detroit's top cocaine dealers.

Mitchell's world came crashing down in September when federal agents raided his Arizona home as part of a probe of two homicides.

Although Mitchell and six others were indicted on drug and money laundering charges in Detroit last year, the extent of his alleged role in Detroit's drug underworld went largely unnoticed until last week when federal officials announced new charges.

Last week, Mitchell and Detroit businessman David W. Steele, 46, were accused of using Mitchell's drug proceeds to buy the St. Regis Hotel on West Grand Boulevard and the Black Orchid Cabaret, a topless bar on Livernois in Detroit.

"At its height, the organization used a fleet of specially modified vehicles to move enormous quantities of cash and cocaine back and forth between Michigan and California," John Gilbride, head of the Drug Enforcement Administration in Detroit, said last week.

Both men have pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Mitchell's lawyer, Steven Fishman, said: "You should listen to Marvin Gaye and his song, 'I Heard it Through the Grapevine' -- believe half of what you see and none of what you hear."

Steele, a three-time Wayne County Commission candidate, denied any involvement.

"I'm innocent of all of the charges," Steele said Wednesday. He said IRS Criminal Investigation Agent Kevin Boudreau promised to ruin him unless Steele helped prosecute Mitchell.

Steele said he knew Mitchell only through Mitchell's uncle, who ran the Black Orchid until Steele closed it in 2001 after a killing.

Steele said he bought the club and the St. Regis for himself, not Mitchell, and that he plans to reopen the Black Orchid in a month. Steele lost the St. Regis in foreclosure proceedings.

Boudreau wouldn't comment.

Details of the investigation are spelled out in court papers he and Assistant U.S. Attorney Bruce Judge filed.

Federal informants said Mitchell bragged about accumulating "Jerry Stackhouse money," a reference to a former Detroit Pistons star. They said he went by M.D., short for Million Dollar.

In addition to the St. Regis and the Black Orchid, records say Mitchell bought houses, an apartment building and other property in the names of associates.

When agents raided his home in Arizona on Sept. 11, they found jewelry, including a \$63,150 diamond-studded Rolex watch.

Mitchell also acquired a fleet of luxury vehicles and a collision shop in Detroit to install secret compartments in the roof liners of cars to haul money and drugs between Detroit and California.

"Make them as big as you can," Mitchell allegedly told a confidential informant. "Make sure the dogs can't find them."

But his efforts failed.

In October 2000, Nebraska State Police found 15 kilograms of cocaine in the roof liner of a 1998 Dodge Durango driven by Marvin Partlow, 32, of Detroit.

In March 2002, the Nebraska State Police found 30 more kilograms in the roof liner of a Lincoln Town Car driven by a Detroit woman, who worked as a courier for the ring, records show.

Between drug busts, agents seized \$480,000 in cash from the ring's couriers.

Court records said the Nebraska drug seizures may have resulted in two killings.

In November 2000, Mitchell's alleged partner, Edward (Jonesy) Jones, was killed in Detroit.

In January 2001, someone killed Partlow's girlfriend outside his home in Detroit. Records said she may have been killed to discourage Partlow from cooperating with investigators.

Mitchell hasn't been charged in the homicides. He's jailed in Detroit, facing charges that carry a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Steele is charged with money laundering and is free on a \$10,000 unsecured bond.

The government has begun forfeiture proceedings to seize Mitchell's property and the Black Orchid.

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Caption: Photo

Marcus Mitchell , left, had a taste for real estate and flashy jewelry. Businessman David W. Steele is at right.

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