

Drug peddling is a problem that is stalling Detroit's revival

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In October of 1988, police found Julia Moss' body in a burned-out Detroit house. Since the house had no steps, Officer Wiley Stewart had to climb on an old chair to enter the house's charred doorway. Moss, 19, who wore pink sneakers, had a small hole in her left eyebrow and burn marks on her face and stomach from a hot potato masher.

Shawn Kinchelow, then a 19-year-old crack dealer, was convicted of murdering Moss. The girl was a crack addict who traded sex for drugs so fast her friends called her Speedy. Kinchelow told a friend he'd killed her for stealing drugs and for refusing his command to eat mud.

I thought about them both after reading the current Detroit News series about relentless drug trafficking in communities such as Brightmoor, an eight-block-long west side neighborhood.

Unfortunately, Detroit never seems to run out of young men willing to risk their lives peddling drugs on the streets, calling out the names of their products like someone peddling snacks. Whole Detroit neighborhoods, in fact, have been wrecked by the deadly and highly addictive form of cocaine called crack and other drugs.

These are the neighborhoods where buildings taken over by drug dealers have been run down, shut down and, finally, stripped and set afire. These are the neighborhoods where young girls who trade sex for drugs hang out in dope houses all day, some never bothering to put on clothes. These are the neighborhoods where even the bus stop signs have bullet holes.

For those who cannot move away from them, such neighborhoods can breed despair. While law-abiding residents live behind screens of fear, children are lured into packaging or dealing drugs, sometimes carrying their guns in potato chip bags.

As The News' series makes clear, a host of factors make it tough to curb the problem: absentee owners who may or may not know drugs are being sold in their dwellings drug dealers who live in homes occupied by nondealing relatives the city's huge inventory of abandoned houses, which provide havens for dealers and police corruption.

But open drug selling on Detroit's streets is nothing new.

It was a fact of life in 1988, when a gunman walked into Richard (Maserati Rick) Carter's hospital room and shot the already wounded Carter to death. Carter, said to be a major cocaine dealer on the city's east side, was buried in a casket with tires and a chrome Mercedes grill, presumably so he could drive in hell.

It was a fact in 1987 when crack dealer **Jesse White** tortured his 7-month-old baby girl with a barbecue fork, slashed her throat and then shot a cop.

And it was a fact the day police discovered Julia Moss' body.

Back then, police told us the city was winning the war on crack. Despite some splashy successes this year, few would float such a claim today.

This, however, is not solely a Detroit problem. Both city-dwellers and suburbanites share a taste for drugs, and big-time drug importers don't live anywhere near Brightmoor.

The well-researched Detroit News series, with its addresses and photographs of known drug houses, poses a challenge to the city to use every possible tool in its battle against one of the biggest barriers to a real Detroit rebirth.

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