

***Black Mafia Family* loses its grip: Highflying lifestyle takes down crime group**

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The billboards once posted along I-75 through downtown Atlanta said it all: "The World is BMF's."

For a time, law enforcement officers say, the drug world did seem to belong to the *Black Mafia Family*, as the organization was believed to control --- or at the very least have a hand in --- the cocaine and crack sold in Atlanta as well as in Detroit and Los Angeles and places in between.

"Every rock [of crack cocaine] sold in Atlanta was no more than three generations from BMF," said Rand Csehy, a former Fulton County prosecutor who was involved in the investigation of the *Black Mafia Family*.

BMF was firmly established in Atlanta before local and federal authorities realized they were here. By that time, 2003, they had become a violent, yet lucrative, national drug distribution organization. Atlanta became a key city in the nationwide organization.

"They took us by surprise," said Atlanta police Detective Bryant Burns, who is assigned to the multi-jurisdictional High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force.

Nationwide, federal authorities have captured more than 100 members of the *Black Mafia Family*, most of them indicted in 2007. Early on, most of the investigations in Atlanta were by local police. For instance, three low-level members were convicted in Fulton Superior Court in 2004. The group's audacious displays of wealth and its reputation for violence attracted the attention of local drug investigators.

Sixteen BMF members indicted in Atlanta are awaiting trial on federal charges. No trial date has been set. In other states, many already have been tried and convicted or have pleaded guilty.

Officials say a sure sign that the *Black Mafia Family* may have been broken came in November when the two brothers who ran the organization --- Demetrius Flenory of Atlanta and Terry Flenory of Los Angeles --- pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court, Detroit, to drug and money laundering charges. The brothers are expected to forfeit hundreds of thousands of dollars and to grow old in federal prison.

When two more cohorts were convicted in Detroit two weeks later --- for a total of 39 BMF members successfully prosecuted by federal authorities there, the largest number of any city --- Detroit federal prosecutor Stephen Murphy pronounced an "end of the notorious *Black Family Mafia* drug organization, which was once a nationwide syndicate."

To date, law enforcement nationwide has seized more than 476 kilograms of cocaine and several million dollars in cash, cars and real estate. Assets seized or forfeited totaled more than \$18 million, according to Murphy.

Federal officials in Atlanta say they are not quite done with BMF, but the group has almost been eliminated.

"They have been shut down by 90 percent," Burns said.

In metro Atlanta, at least three shootings have been linked to the group in recent years. No one has been convicted.

In September 2003, BMF member William Marshall fatally shot a home invader. Marshall was not charged in that incident.

The next year, Demetrius Flenory was accused of fatally shooting two people outside Chaos, a defunct Buckhead nightclub that BMF later bought and opened as the bar Babylon. He faces trial on state charges for those killings.

Eight months later, there was another BMF-linked homicide. Fleming Daniels, or "Ill," faces state charges stemming from a fatal shooting outside the Velvet Room, where a group had clashed over whether someone touched a car. Daniels also is one of the 16 facing federal charges in Atlanta.

For the most part, *Black Mafia Family* was a drug distributor, not a street dealer, moving cocaine in multiple kilos, federal authorities say. The organization was able to capture the city's drug market primarily by undercutting competitors' prices. It also "had a great propensity for violence," Burns said.

Still, it was mostly the members' flash that brought them down. In particular, Demetrius Flenory, who answered to the name of Meech, got caught up with big money and hip-hop celebrities and was very public about his spending and his threats.

In videos posted on YouTube, Flenory and others boasted about their wealth, their cars and their sexual prowess. They brandished handguns and semi-automatic weapons and taunted the Drug Enforcement Administration and the FBI.

BMF threw elaborate parties; one included zebras, lions and an elephant. It would run bar tabs --- drinks for everyone --- that totaled tens of thousands of dollars. Its members would walk into a nightclub and toss \$20 bills into the air for patrons to fight over.

The top people in BMF drove Bentleys, Porsches and Maseratis, and usually decorated themselves with thick gold chains and diamonds.

And when there was trouble, witnesses were scarce.

"These guys ran the city through fear," Csehy said.

Burns said witnesses would "disappear or change their stories."

BMF put up billboards along key roads declaring the world was theirs.

"They made it clear.... They marked their territory," Csehy said.

But the attention they attracted brought their downfall, Burns and Csehy said.

"They thought they were smart," Csehy said. "But they just didn't leave well enough alone."

CAPTION: JOHN SPINK / Staff Lawyer Drew Findling with his client Demetrius Flenory in a November court appearance in Fulton County. Flenory was charged in the deaths of two people from a possible gunfight.

CAPTION: Terry Flenory of Los Angeles was an alleged ring leader of the *Black Family Mafia*.

Credit: STAFF