

## **Drug traffickers live in burbs, deal in Detroit - They buy big homes to launder money and avoid scrutiny**

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Increasingly, Metro Detroit's drug dealers are moving to expensive suburban homes while carrying out their business and crimes in Detroit.

"It's almost like any other suburban job: You have to drive to the city to get to your job," said John P. Gilbride, the special agent in charge of the Detroit Drug Enforcement Administration.

"Drug traffickers want to legitimize their appearances. They want to blend in and not attract attention."

Flush with cash, drug dealers purchase homes to launder illegal money and to avoid scrutiny of their fancy cars, boats and jewelry.

Two federal indictments of alleged unrelated drug distribution networks since February show that most of the suspects lived in upscale suburban homes.

Two dozen people are charged in the indictments, accused of selling at least 65 tons of marijuana worth more than \$130 million since 1991.

While the dealers live in the suburbs, much of the violence associated with their business occurs in troubled sections of Detroit, authorities say.

In March, the U.S. Attorney's Office indicted Tommie Lee Hodges and Leonard Shoulders, claiming the two earned more than \$50 million in drug profits and distributed more than 25 tons of marijuana over the last three years.

Recently unsealed court records show that the pair and other alleged members of the ring owned or controlled expensive homes in Chesterfield Township, St. Clair Shores, Shelby Township, Bloomfield Hills, West Bloomfield, New Baltimore, Sterling Heights, Clinton Township and Roseville. Many of the houses, searched by DEA agents, were worth more than \$1 million.

Gilbride, who took over as head of the Detroit DEA in February, said well-heeled drug traffickers find advantages in suburban life.

"You don't want to be looking over your shoulder to see whether you're going to get robbed, beaten up or killed," Gilbride said. "They don't want to be associated with violence that brings the scrutiny of law enforcement."

Frequently, investigators say, drug dealers purchase property in the names of other people, in an effort to avoid drawing the attention of law enforcement agents.

Hodges' \$1.2 million lakefront St. Clair Shores home had a high-tech security fence and cameras, federal officials said. He also owned numerous luxury cars and two yachts, including one worth more than \$420,000.

A search of the Clinton Township home on Manorwood where Hodges was arrested turned up \$225,000 in cash, eight cell phones, four handguns, a 2003 Range Rover and lots of jewelry, authorities said. All the material was seized because it was suspected of coming from drug profits.

The government said Hodges and Shoulders used homes in Detroit to distribute and store much of the marijuana.

DEA Special Agent Harry Swain said the suspected drug dealers "engaged in money laundering activities to acquire assets which include luxury vehicles, boats and real estate."

At the same time, the feud between Hodges and a rival alleged drug trafficker has resulted in significant violence in Detroit, said Swain, a member of a joint Detroit homicide task force.

"The task force has identified over 11 homicides and four house firebombings linked to the feud between Tommie Hodges and **Quasand Lewis**," Swain said in an affidavit filed last week.

James White was charged last week with the attempted murder of a man suspected of laundering money for Hodges and his organization. The federal complaint also said a confidential informant told the DEA in December that Hodges and another man were offering \$30,000 to White to have Ivan Cannon, a rival drug dealer, murdered.

In early March, Cannon was shot and killed in Detroit.

Searches at the Oakland and Macomb homes allegedly controlled by Hodges and his associates turned up Rolex Oyster watches, flat screen TVs, dozens of cell phones and nearly \$1 million in cash. DEA agents also seized motorcycles and a dozen expensive cars.

A separate search of a Clinton Township storage locker turned up a 2003 Mercedes-Benz E500.

In the other major drug case, the U.S. attorney's office announced Feb. 23 that 20 people from six states had been indicted as part of a multimillion-dollar drug ring that sold at least 40 tons of marijuana since 1991 worth more than \$80 million on the street.

Under plea bargains, two suspects face up to 79 months in prison.

Ten of the 20 suspects are from Detroit suburbs: Grosse Pointe Park, Birmingham, Chesterfield Township, Sterling Heights, Livonia, Grosse Pointe Woods, Royal Oak, Harper Woods, St. Clair Shores and Harrison Township.

Others are from Arizona, California, Florida, Nevada and New Jersey.

Much of marijuana was shipped to a residence and business owned by Grosse Pointe Park resident John Brosnan, 46, the government said. Collins identified Brosnan as an organizer of the group. In March, federal agents seized 3,700 pounds of marijuana at his home.

In total, the government is seeking at least \$50 million in property from the alleged drug deals in the Hodges investigation and a sport utility vehicle and three properties in Grosse Pointe Park and Detroit.

The DEA aggressively goes after drug proceeds wherever agents find them.

"Drug trafficking is not just an inner-city problem. It cuts across all spheres and neighborhoods," Gilbride said. "Whether that drug trafficker is living in a nice neighborhood, not dealing there, the drug money is still there."

About the drug cases

\* In March, two men were indicted on charges they had made more than \$50 million in drug profits since 2001 by distributing more than 25 tons of marijuana. They owned or controlled homes in many cities in Oakland and Macomb counties. They were also responsible for a drug feud in which at least 11 people have died in Detroit in the past 18 months, the government says.

\* In February, 20 people, including 10 from Detroit suburbs, were indicted on charges they distributed more than 40 tons of marijuana. Two have pleaded guilty. The alleged ringleader lived in Grosse Pointe Park.

Caption: A federal grand jury has indicted Tommie Lee Hodges and Leonard Shoulders on charges of drug dealing. Hodges owned this \$1.2 million lakefront home in St. Clair Shores.

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