

FBI NABS 2 MORE DETROIT COPS

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Two **Detroit** Police officers were arraigned Thursday on a federal complaint of conspiring to distribute cocaine, an offense that could send them to prison for 25 years.

The 8th (Grand River) Precinct officers, Derek Florence, 28, and Michael Winters, 23, were arrested Wednesday, along with Keenan Wells, 29. In court records, **FBI** agents said Wells is a leader of a local street gang.

Winters and Florence are the 15th and 16th **Detroit** police officers charged with federal crimes in the last 14 months. In a separate hearing Thursday, a previously charged officer pleaded guilty to taking part in a plot to rob a Southfield bookie of \$1 million.

In the 8th Precinct case, **FBI** agents, with help from another police officer, set the three men up in a sting.

Here is how it came together, according to the criminal complaint against the three men:

Florence and Winters asked another officer to join in the distribution. Their plan was to steal drugs from one dealer and turn them over to Wells to sell for a share of the profits. The third officer told his commander and the **FBI**.

On Wednesday, federal agents watched as Florence and Winters took a bag with two kilograms of fake cocaine out of a car and put it in their police car. **FBI** agents had placed the bag there.

Florence and Winters drove back to the precinct headquarters, where they placed the bag in Winters' personal car and then called the third 8th Precinct officer and told him to pick up the drugs. That officer then went to the precinct and took the bag out of Winters' car.

Winters and Florence were then arrested and taken away in handcuffs.

Thomas Howard, a lawyer representing Winters, said his client has been an officer for three years and has an outstanding record, receiving at least three citations. Winters is married and his wife is weeks away from delivering their child, Howard said.

"He's upset at the fact that he was here and these accusations have been made," Howard said. "He's upset because he is on the opposite end of the street now."

Donald Solberg, Florence's lawyer, said only that Florence has been on the force since 1996.

Winters and Florence were released on \$10,000 personal bond. A preliminary hearing has been scheduled for Dec. 9. They were suspended from the department without pay.

The officers, still uniformed but stripped of badges and stripes, hid from cameras as they left court. Florence and Winters are partners and were on duty at the time of the drug transaction and bust.

Wells faces a detention hearing today, where a magistrate will determine his bond. He was arrested at his home on Oakfield by **Detroit** Police after the third officer delivered the fake cocaine to him.

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents have been investigating the gang Wells allegedly helps run since at least June 1997, according to records in U.S. District Court in **Detroit** . Federal prosecutors have indicted on drug-trafficking charges two alleged gang members and seven others affiliated with the gangs, said a federal official who asked not to be named.

Several hours after Florence and Winters were charged on the first floor of the federal courthouse, officer Edward James of the 5th (Jefferson) Precinct pleaded guilty on the seventh floor to conspiracy to commit robbery.

James, 34, told U.S. District Judge Julian Abele Cook he planned the robbery with his three codefendants, two of whom are also **Detroit** police officers, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Jonathan Tukel. He faces an estimated 87 months to 108 months in prison, Tukel said. He is free on bond.

Officer Vernon Gentry has also pleaded guilty in the same case and is awaiting sentencing. A jury could not reach a verdict on the third officer, Kevin Larkins, after a trial in August. He will be retried later with James' cousin, Selena Turner, who is not a **cop** .

Five of 10 officers from the 6th (Plymouth) Precinct have either pleaded guilty or been convicted by a jury of conspiring to rip off drug dealers. Another was convicted only of lying to a grand jury; three have been acquitted, and one is awaiting trial.

In a separate case, a federal grand jury charged Officer William Wagner last month with a civil rights violation in the 1996 beating of a motorist.

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