

Crack Hits Midtown With 'Bang'



Newsday Photos Viora Floresca

An unidentified policeman and two members of the Guardian Angels walk their separate "beats" in Hell's Kitchen Park

Hampers efforts to revitalize

By Chapin Wright

"Dice" — tall and thin, attired in black cap, black T-shirt, black pants — said the better part of his 29 years, has been spent selling drugs and hustling on "the Deuce," or 42nd Street.

Standing on a sidewalk on West 42nd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, Dice remembered the days before "renegade" crack dealers from uptown swarmed over the block.

"They come and go," he said of the "bums" who make \$200 to \$300 a day selling crack and spend it as quickly. "They come here because it's convenient."

"But there is no center in the crack business," he said. "It's a world of drifters."

That world has exacted an incalculable toll in Times Square and the Clinton section of Manhattan to the north. In the few years since the potent cocaine derivative first appeared on the streets, it has become an undeniable, devastating part of daily life.

"The impact of crack has been swift and dramatic in the midtown area," said William H. Daly, director of the Mayor's Office of Midtown Enforcement, which oversees the development of the midtown area, including law enforcement. "It has come into the midtown area with a bang."

Crack has dealt a severe blow to efforts to revitalize areas along Eighth and Ninth Avenues in the Clinton neighborhood, formerly known as "Hell's Kitchen." The situation became so desperate that some business owners took matters into their own hands. Restaurants along West 46th Street fought back, summoning the Guardian Angels, an anticrime patrol to drive the dealers and users from their steps.

The intense demand for the drug and its relatively easy manufacture have meant there are a lot more dangerous people on the streets now than five years ago, said William P. Ryan, district manager for Community Board 4, which represents the Clinton neighborhood.

"The decline [of the Clinton area] has to do with the availability of crack, its potency and its addictiveness," said Ryan. "While the sale of any drug is going to have crime coming with it, crack has affected so many people and made them so desperate for the drug that it makes them more threatening."

"It's the volume of people that's noticeable, the volume of sellers," he said. "There are a lot more dealers operating independently and competing. It's an incredible scene on the street and in apartment buildings."

Ryan said business and the condition of the neighborhood were improving. "And crack certainly set all of that back and created a very difficult problem."

In the first five months of this year 200 drug arrests were made around Times Square by members of a Manhattan South special anticrime unit, said Lt. John Fahey, who commands the unit.

"We find mostly open-air selling... A lot of people preying on outsiders, selling substitutes such as bread or

Drug Battle In Clinton, Building By Building

By Chapin Wright

In the Clinton neighborhood, the war against crack is being fought block by block and sometimes building by building.

On the corner of West 46th Street and Eighth Avenue is a collection of buildings that had become a haven for crack dealing.

"That corner didn't become a hot drug corner because it's near Times Square," said William P. Ryan, district manager for Community Board 4. "It was exacerbated by conditions" in those buildings.

"The buildings were absolutely deeply entrenched with drug traffic," said Joe Restuccia, executive director of the Clinton Housing Development Company. "They had become a true center of drug traffic."

As Restuccia tells it, the crack dealers and their customers had nearly destroyed the insides of the buildings, which were owned by the late real estate developer Sol Goldman. They are now in redevelopment and managed by CHDC, a not-for-profit organization.

The buildings — 727 and 729 Eighth Ave. and 300, 302, 304 and 306 W. 46th St. — contain 81 residential units. At the height of the drug activity, only 10 tenants were left.

"It had got like Vietnam out there," said building manager John Shackelford. "I mean, rough especially after two in the morning."

"In 306 there was a woman dead in the hallway for two days and no one said anything because they thought she was passed out," Restuccia said. "I work with 100 to 150 buildings. I've never seen anything approaching it."

CHDC, in an effort to reclaim the buildings, undertook a series of eviction proceedings against drug dealers. Since February, 15 to 18 suspected drug dealers have been forced out. Several other evictions were carried out in other buildings or



A Guardian Angel tells a man to move at Hell's Kitchen Park.

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Beefing Up a Law Against Pushers

By Larry Bivins

Mayor Edward I. Koch is expected to sign into law today an amendment to the city's padlock law that will make it easier for police to shut down suspected drug parlors and ultimately provide investigators more time to pursue other cases.

Under the new law, police will not have to serve notice on the owner or the lessor of an establishment determined to be a public nuisance before padlocking it. All that will be necessary is that the notice of hearing be served on an employee or posted on the premises. The new law also clarifies language to specify that the padlock order becomes effective on the fifth day after posting.

When signed, the new law will become another, albeit subtle, weapon in the city's war on drugs, particularly the potent cocaine derivative called crack. But it will also aid police in closing massage parlors and gambling dens.

Police investigators have identified numerous storefronts — candy stores, smoke shops, video arcades, etc. — where drugs are sold. They have had problems shutting down the places under the old law because it required that the owners or lessors of the establishment be served a notice of hearing in person or that it be posted at his residence.

Often police have no knowledge of the identity or address of the owner or lessor, which means investigators have to spend more time tracking down the individuals instead of pursuing other cases, said Thomas Slade, deputy police commissioner. He added that often these individuals, once found, refuse to accept the notices. As a result, there were delays in closing the locations.

"There's been a number of cases where people see something that says 'police' on it and don't accept it," Slade said. "We've never lost a case, but we've had a few in which the hearing was delayed

or people said they didn't get the notice."

Slade said the amendment was determined necessary to deal with a new nuisance that has emerged since the padlock law's inception. He said drug dealers have become skilled in using the technicalities of the old law to evade prosecution.

"This will make the system more effective and enable us to investigate more places with the same number of people," Slade said.

The new law, requested by the mayor on behalf of the police department, was passed by the City Council on June 16.

"In some ways it's a technical change that may seem minor, but its impact is major in terms of its potential effect on the drug trade," said Councilman Walter McCaffrey of Queens. "The folks on the other side of the law are as innovative and mindful of the technicalities of law as we are, so we have to be one step ahead of them."

Crack Hits Times Square Area With 'Bang'

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soap [instead of cocaine]," Fahey said. "Most of the people we arrest are from outside the area. . . . It's a busy area. You don't get much busier."

It's just as busy in Clinton, the neighborhood west and north of Times Square.

Last year, police made 600 arrests in the area from 45th to 47th Streets between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. Arrests in that two-block area in the first six months of this year reached 600.

Crime statistics, however, don't tell the whole story.

William Hopkins is the deputy director of the research bureau of the New York State Division on Substance Abuse. His agency was the first to identify crack when it first appeared in New York City in late 1983.

"It causes people to go indoors earlier, it causes stores to take seats out so dealers don't use the premises, businesses have closed down. It has also tended to unite some communities," Hopkins said.

Curtis Sliwa last month led a band of his Guardian Angels into Restaurant Row, after restaurant owners complained they weren't getting enough police protection. Sliwa called crack "the gasoline on the fire" in Clinton.

"It's always been dangerous," Sliwa said. "But with crack it never subsides. Things used to slow down after 3 a.m. That used to give the police a little breathing room. With crack there is no slowdown. It is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year."

Along 42nd Street, where the drug action is nonstop, some theater owners and merchants have reached a state of relatively peaceful coexistence with the crack dealers stationed outside their doors.

"When we get here in the morning they're here," said an employee at Scott Hats on 42nd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue. "When we leave in the evening, they're here."

The employee, who asked that his name not be used, said he has an "understanding" with the young men who regularly hang out around the entrance to the store.

"They don't bother our customers," he said. "We have to be here to make a living, so we establish rules: You stay out there and do what you want. Just leave us alone."

Down the block is the Selwyn Theater, a 964-seat movie house where a double-feature costs \$5.

Manager Abe Kaplan said that "on the whole, it's not too bad. It's not as

bad as people believe. I suppose it could be worse.

"The pushers know they are doing wrong. They don't give us a hard time. I know them. They know me. Some know me by name. If I ask them to move, they will. They wouldn't hurt me because they know me," he said. Sometimes the pushers will walk him to the subway, Kaplan said.

"They're just trying to make a living. Unfortunately, it's the wrong type," he said. "The cops are here. If we call them, they're here. But if we can solve it ourselves with our own security guards, we will do it."

The Theater District, despite its proximity to crack activity, is one area that appears to have been spared. There are 35 theaters in the district, most of them on 44th, 45th and 47th Streets, between Eighth Avenue and Broadway.

"I have not perceived crack dealing on the theater streets," said Gerald Schoenfeld, chairman of the Shubert Organization, which represents theater owners.

"We lived through street prostitution in the '70s. We had to live through massage parlors. We had to live through peep shows," Schoenfeld said. "And now we have to live through the crack."

The reason the theater streets have remained untouched, said Andrew Albert, executive director of the West Side Chamber of Commerce, is that, "When you get close to, certain time, and there are all these theatergoers, it becomes very infertile ground for them [the dealers]. There's too much activity."

Before the advent of crack, prostitution was the major problem along Eighth and Ninth Avenues in Clinton, said Daly of the Mayor's Office of Midtown Enforcement.

"That had been cleaned up," he said. "We had closed a lot of illegal uses." Then crack appeared.

Now Daly's office is working with the police, using a two-pronged approach that worked in the efforts to eradicate prostitution: beefed-up patrols and court action directed at evicting drug dealers. "We have to bring more actions more often," Daly said. "You just have to keep the pressure on."

In addition to crime, crack has had a serious impact on housing in Clinton.

"Low-income housing stock is being taken over," Ryan said. Some buildings are being "intentionally destabilized" by landlords eager to find more lucrative uses for their property. Crack dealers are allowed to move in

and low-income tenants, in turn, are forced out.

"We have not just been fighting the onslaught of the development community, now we are dealing with deeply entrenched crack that absolutely rips apart a building," said Joe Restuccia, head of the Clinton Housing Development Co., a not-for-profit group trying to reclaim buildings taken over by drug dealers.

Once crack gains hold in a neighborhood and residents feel powerless to fight back, "it takes an incredible will to rid an area of this scourge," said Albert of the Chamber of Commerce.

Before the highly publicized arrival of Guardian Angels on Restaurant Row, patrons often were forced to negotiate their way around junkies, crack users and sellers. For restaurant owners, it became a matter of economic survival.

"They would sit on my steps and smoke crack in broad daylight," said Matthew Kanter, manager of Broadway Joe Steak House, 315 W. 46th St. "Every single day, the sidewalk would be littered with crack vials."

The Guardian Angels changed that. Brought in at the request of the restaurant owners, teams of young volunteers roamed the streets, confiscating pipes and lighters from crack users and making citizen's arrests.

The immediate results have been dramatic along Restaurant Row, but the long-term effect of the Angels' controversial anti-crack patrols remains to be seen.

"I see little old ladies shopping on the street I never saw before," said John Audrone, manager of Audrone's at 342 W. 46th St. "Instead of being prisoners in their homes, they're out again. I see kids playing on the street I never saw before."

But the scene is less encouraging just one block up.

"Since they cleared 46th Street, they got it over here," said Roxanne Nadolsky, who works at Times Square Lighting Inc. at 318 W. 47th St.

"The last three years have been very, very bad in this area," Nadolsky said. "First, you only had prostitutes. Now, you have everything."

Deputy Insp. Edward F. Fitzgerald, commanding officer of the Midtown North Precinct, believes he is beginning to "turn the corner" in the fight against crack in Clinton.

By saturating problem areas with uniformed and undercover officers, Fitzgerald said he hopes "to bring it [the area] back to where it was a few years ago."

Beginning today, a special 15-member West Side Task Force will be deployed in the area between Ninth and Eleventh Avenues, from West 43rd to West 59th Streets, which includes Hell's Kitchen Park at Tenth Avenue and 47th Street. That area has been identified by police as one of the "chronic areas" of crack activity, Fitzgerald said.

The task-force officers will be supplemented by increased foot and scooter patrols as well as additional undercover officers, Fitzgerald said.

"I think we'll be successful," he said.

Clinton's Drug War

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48th Street and Ninth Avenue, Restuccia said.

"We brought holdover proceedings based on nuisance drug activity," Restuccia explained. "You terminate their tenancy, and if they do not move within 30 days, you go to court."

But drug dealers were only part of the problem.

"The buildings were in incredible disrepair," Restuccia said.

Banisters had been torn away and doors ripped from their hinges. Walls were full of holes where dealers kept their stashes. There were no working toilets. Violence was commonplace.

Basic services have now been restored to all the units, new windows have been installed, all doors have been replaced, most leaks have been fixed, and all damage from a February fire at 727 Eighth Ave. has been repaired, Restuccia said.

"We're trying to establish a decent SRO [single-room occupancy]," he said. "Only six rooms are empty. . . . The dealers have not come back."

Some long-time residents complain that, while the drug dealers have departed, building repairs are taking too long to complete.

Arthur Bell, who has lived at 304 W. 46th St. for 12 years, said the drug dealers are still in the neighborhood, "just one block over."

"The building improvements have been minimal," he said.