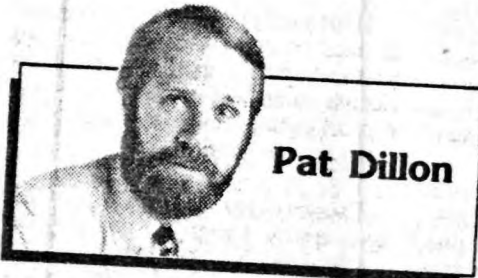


Peninsula / State

Mountain View • Los Altos • Los Altos Hills • Palo Alto

Drug sting snares 21 in East P.A.



Pat Dillon

Cane-did Camera on the candy biz

IT'S POST time in the procrastination sweepstakes. Serious shopping is about to begin.
Never mind that most together people.

By Brandon Bailey
Mercury News Staff Writer

Drug dealers who specialize in street sales of rock cocaine have some new competition in East Palo Alto: the Police Department.

A team of eight undercover officers spent most of an evening last Friday selling cocaine to people who drove along the 2300 block of Clark Avenue. As soon as each sale was made, the officers identified themselves and arrested the buyer.

"We ran the normal dealers off," said East Palo Alto police Sgt. Nick Bennett. "We took over their turf."

Although the unusual sting technique has been used by narcotics officers in Florida and other parts of the country, police and prosecutors say that East Palo Alto officers may be the first to try it in the Bay Area.

Officials in San Francisco and Oakland said they haven't authorized similar operations because of limited resources and the

potential for entrapment. But prosecutors in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties praised the idea.

Friday's operation ended with 21 arrests. And Bennett said more than a few of the suspects were amazed to find they had just purchased a "rock" of cocaine from a police officer.

The idea was to attack the problem of rampant drug sales that occur when a neighborhood or community gets the reputation as an easy place to buy drugs, police

said.

"We figure that by doing this ... you stop the demand and maybe the supply will dry up," said Detective Reginald Brown, one of the officers involved.

Brown said he proposed the operation to his superiors after watching a similar technique demonstrated on Geraldo Rivera's recent television special about drug use in the United States.

East Palo Alto has long had the reputation as an easy place to buy drugs, police
See DRUGS, Page 4B

4B Tuesday, Dec. 23, 1986 ■ San Jose Mercury News ••

East P.A. police take over dealers' turf

DRUGS, from Page 1B
tion as a center for drug sales and drug-related crime on the San Francisco Peninsula.

"That is the major problem," Brown said. "We're getting a lot of outsiders" who come into the city to buy drugs.

Authorities in Oakland and San Francisco said they have considered similar operations but ruled them out.

"You could have difficulty getting a jury to swallow it," said Ken Kingsbury, an Alameda County deputy district attorney who supervises the interagency Urban

Narcotics Task Force based in Oakland.

"Those same officers could be out busting dealers," said Al Giannini, head of the vice crimes unit in the San Francisco District Attorney's Office. "If you're interested in cleaning up a street corner, a couple of uniformed officers could do it."

But the chief narcotics prosecutor in Santa Clara County praised the East Palo Alto effort, although he said he's not aware of any similar efforts in his own county.

If the effort disrupts drug sales, "then I say more power to them," said Richard Beard, chief of the narcotics unit in the

Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office.

Like other prosecutors, Beard compared the operation to a typical prostitution bust in which an undercover female officer stands on a corner and waits until men offer her money for sex.

East Palo Alto officers sought legal advice and followed specific guidelines for avoiding entrapment before they undertook the operation, said Paul Wendler, a prosecutor in the San Mateo County District Attorney's Office.

Wendler said it was the first such opera-

tion ever tried in San Mateo County.

Plainclothes officers stood on the sidewalk and waited for motorists to ask them about buying drugs, Bennett said.

Typically, the would-be buyers would ask "Are you holding?" or "Got any hub-bas?" — a street term for rock cocaine, said Brown.

Officers used cocaine that had been seized in other cases, Bennett said. The going rate was \$25 for a chunk of crystallized cocaine.

"I think they're making good arrests," added Wendler.

Detective Reginald Brown said he proposed the operation after watching a similar technique demonstrated on Geraldo Rivera's recent television special.

12B T