

METRICH confiscates crack at candy store

By MARK CAUDILL
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MANSFIELD -- Police found more than sweets at a home candy store early Thursday.

The METRICH Enforcement Unit, with help from the Allied Special Operations Response Team and city police, raided the residence at 129 Washington Ave. and seized 2 grams of crack, 3 grams of marijuana and suspected stolen property.

The occupant of the residence and target of the investigation was operating a candy store for neighborhood children. She had a valid vendor's license. Police reported finding crack in the cash drawer behind the counter where the woman was selling candy.

The News Journal is not identifying her because charges are still pending.

Within minutes of the first search warrant, police raided the residence at 331 W. Fourth St., Apt. 2, arresting Freddie Sams, 40, for possession of crack. They confiscated 5 grams of crack, a small amount of marijuana, scales and \$290 in cash.

"We wanted to hit them simultaneously, but it didn't work out from a safety standpoint," METRICH Commander Lt. Dino Sgambellone said.

Four children were living at 129 Washington Ave.

"We honor our commitment to the community by looking out for situations like this where children are put at greater risk," Sgambellone said. "That includes the children that are present in the residence, as well as those who may have patronized the candy store."

Sgambellone said there is no evidence the woman sold crack to children.

A 15-year-old girl who lives on Washington Avenue said the suspect gave her and her older sister a ride to school one day.

"She told us she was opening a candy store," said the teen, who asked not to be identified. "She said to come by."

The girl and her family said they were unaware of any drug activity. But looking back, the 15-year-old said there was a lot of traffic in and out of the residence.

"People would park right in our driveway," she said. "I thought, 'What are they doing over there?'"

The girl's 17-year-old sister said she would have appreciated a candy store in the neighborhood.

"I didn't realize she was selling crack," the teen said. "That's not cool."

Signs on two windows of the two-story white house say "come in, we're open." The mother of the two teenage girls, who also asked not to be identified, said she didn't suspect any criminal goings-on.

"I know times are hard and people are doing stuff to get by, but to go to the extreme of selling drugs, it's not worth it," she said.

The family has lived in the neighborhood for two years.

"I think we should move," the 17-year-old said.

Moving isn't an option for Lorine Austen, 81. She has been in her home since 1988.

"At my age, why start paying for a house all over again?" Austen said, taking a break from shoveling snow.

While Austen didn't know about the alleged activity at the candy store, she said drugs have been an ongoing issue in the neighborhood, which has its share of nice homes and abandoned ones.

"I know they've been dealing," Austen said. "It has been here forever."

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