

# Drug damage

*Crack raid leaves homeowner searching for answers*

By Jeff Hinkle

It was business as usual as far as officers of the Worcester Vice Squad were concerned. Just another bust aimed at netting crack dealers.

That may be, says 87-year-old Helen Banis, but she wonders who is going to repair the home her family has owned for more than 70 years.

News

On the morning of May 20, Banis was shocked to see Worcester's finest converging on her property and charging up the stairs to the top floor of her Crompton Park triple-decker.

"There were 10 of them. Big bruisers. They broke down the upstairs door and brought everybody down in handcuffs. They didn't even come to my door. They never said a word to me. They just waved as they walked by," recalls Banis.

Even though the house belongs to Banis and she resides on its first floor, police were not required to notify her before the raid. They had a "No Knock" warrant. Anyone who has watched the shaky-camera action unfold on the television show "Cops" knows that such a warrant means a fevered, full-scale assault is permitted.

Authorities were after Banis's two upstairs tenants, David Jacevicius and Tina Cormier, who were suspected of dealing crack cocaine. Vice officers

broke down the door, tore apart cabinets, shelving, ceiling tiles, walls, cupboards and even the apartment's gas stove seeking drugs. Minutes into the raid, Jacevicius, Cormier and visitor Edward Hamp were arrested and charged with possession of cocaine with intent to distribute.

The bust netted two rocks of cocaine and \$150 in cash.

What the police left behind was disarray, says Banis. "They left so much garbage, you couldn't believe it," she says. "There were piles of garbage in every room. I got an estimate of \$600 just to move the stuff out of the apartment."

Banis, who is nearly deaf, partially blind, suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure and relies on a walker to get around, didn't have \$600 to spend. Instead she collected the clothes and garbage — in 30 trash bags — and hauled them down the three flights of stairs herself. This after a representative from the Salvation Army told her they would appreciate a clothing donation, but they "didn't do stairs."

The apartment now shows signs of damage and discarded furniture. Twisted locks, hinges and hardware, shards of wood and torn insulation. "This looks good now," she says. "If you saw it after the cops left, you wouldn't believe it."

Until it is repaired, she cannot rent the apartment. Because she cannot afford the repairs, she has contacted the police department, the city's Office of Elder

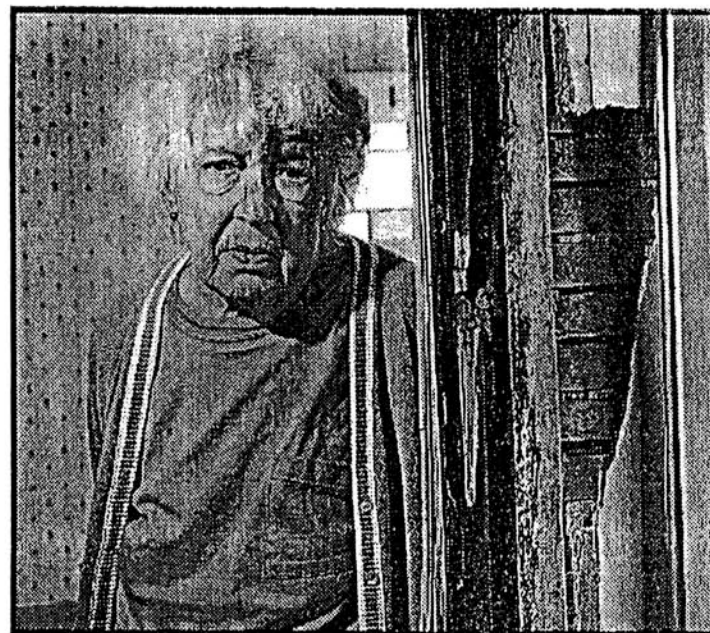
Affairs and the mayor's office in the hope they can help. "They all told me to contact my insurance company," she says, which is now reviewing the matter.

"We try and keep the damage to a minimum," says Capt. Keith Benway, commanding officer of Worcester's Vice Squad. "It's a dangerous business we're in. Our primary concerns are the officers' safety and getting drugs off the street."

Benway says he is unaware of any complaint filed by Banis. Five months has passed since the raid, he says, and that should be considered. "I'm not comfortable with her coming forward at this late date. Who's to say what has happened in that apartment since May?"

Hamp pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of simple possession, and is serving the remainder of a six-month sentence. Cormier and Jacevicius also pleaded guilty to the same charge. Both were placed on six months' probation and ordered to complete drug treatment. Banis has seen none of them since May.

Banis also has the letter from police she received two days after the raid. It reminds her that it is a crime to provide shelter to known drug dealers. Should



**Helen Banis: Still picking up the pieces.**

she fail to officially evict the criminals, she could face up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

She wrote back assuring the authorities she had not seen the tenants since the arrest and the apartment was empty. "I am 87-and-a-half years old," she wrote, "I don't need any more trouble."

Benway is unaware of any procedure in place to help Banis recover the cost of damages. He suggested she talk to the city's legal department. "I will say this," he says. "She was grateful when we raided the place. She was living in fear before that."

That may be, although Banis denies any knowledge of her tenants' criminal activities. "These days, I'm ashamed to walk down the street," she says. "I hope the neighbors don't think I deal drugs."