

# Police say man dealt drugs for decades

By Kevin Diaz  
Staff Writer

Although they could never pin a charge on him before this week, police said Ralph (Plukey) Duke's name has been associated with drugs in the Twin Cities for nearly 20 years.

Agents of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) have pegged him "the orchestrator of one of the largest and most extensive drug operations in the state," but they said in a news release that they always found themselves unable to penetrate his organization deeply enough to incriminate him.

Instead, they set up the most exten-

sive drug task force ever assembled in the Twin Cities to disrupt his connections and dry up his sources. Then on Wednesday, using 20 kilos of government cocaine as bait, drug agents say they got members of Duke's organization to make a \$140,000 deal with them.

"They were scrambling around looking for a safe source, and they found us," said Jim Braseth, head of the DEA office in Minneapolis.

Duke, 43, his 19-year-old son, Ralph LaMont Nunn, and four associates were arrested late Wednesday after a drug deal was set up in the parking lot of the Minneapolis Metrodome Hilton Hotel on Industrial Blvd.

Another man was arrested Friday afternoon at Duke's guarded compound in Watertown, which has been sealed off by authorities. All the suspects are being held without bail pending a hearing Monday in federal court in St. Paul.

Braseth said the arrests are the culmination of a four-month investigation by 14 law enforcement agencies that involved wholesale seizures of drugs and money in Minnesota, Iowa, California and elsewhere.

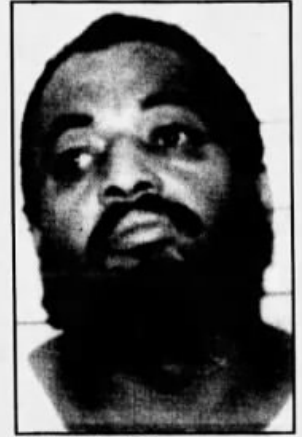
The operation is expected to have a noticeable effect on the Twin Cities drug market, at least temporarily, Braseth said. "I think there's going to be a drought for a while, but there's always a vice president somewhere

ready to be chairman of the board."

More than 9 kilos of cocaine were taken from a courier after a traffic stop in Iowa, \$40,000 was taken from another courier in Los Angeles, and another \$20,000 and several weapons were taken in a raid at one of Duke's residences in Minneapolis this month. About \$300,000 has been taken altogether. Authorities say they believe all those people worked for Duke.

"We were trying to disrupt their normal operations," said Braseth. He said Duke is believed to supply himself directly from a Colombian drug cartel that ferries cocaine through

Duke continued on page 6B



Ralph (Plukey) Duke