

# Drug traffic probe targets agency head

By SCOTT WILLIAMS  
of the Journal Star

Michael E. Banks, administrator of a federally funded Peoria anti-poverty agency, has been targeted by federal authorities who are investigating drug trafficking in Peoria with the help of an undercover informant.

The FBI has enlisted the services of an admitted drug dealer — cleared of all charges in exchange for his cooperation — to investigate Banks for possible involvement in the financing of drug transactions.

The investigation apparently has hinged on the ability of that government operative to make contact with other known and suspected drug dealers whom FBI agents hope can lead them to Banks.

However, the undercover nature of the operation was blown last week when one drug dealer, who describes himself as a personal friend of Banks, refused to cooperate and accused the government of trying to entrap him.

Now, Banks contends that the FBI is investigating him without justification and trying desperately to implicate him in the local drug market.

"I am not involved in drug trafficking. I'm in no way connected with any of that," he said during a telephone interview Thursday.

Banks' attorney, Robert L. Silverstein, said the drug dealer refusing to cooperate with the federal investigation was pursued by FBI agents until the final day of his trial last week.

"We do not understand the motives of the FBI in trying to implicate



**MICHAEL E. BANKS**

Mr. Banks in any way whatsoever," Silverstein said.

The FBI began its investigation at least several months ago with cooperation from the Illinois Division of Criminal Investigation and the Multi-County Narcotics Enforcement Group, a special local undercover unit.

Investigators at all three levels this week refused to comment about their operation.

However, Edgar Charles Johnson Jr., the one-time drug dealer turned

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