



THEY CALL HER THE "SAC" – agency shorthand for special agent in charge. But in June Stansbury's career busting drug dealers, she's definitely been called worse.

New England's newest weapon in the war on drugs is June Stansbury, the only African-American woman to head up a DEA field division. The pot-smoking capital of the United States is officially on notice.

BY ELAINE MCARDLE

Special Agent

June Stansbury, the head of the US Drug Enforcement Administration's New England field division, had barely been on the job two months when a federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration study came out. Turns out Boston has more marijuana smokers than anywhere else in the country, with 12 percent of youths and adults polled admitting use, according to the report released in June.

"Isn't that awful?" Stansbury, 47, says. "And I'd just gotten here, too." She shakes her head. "I don't know if it's because of the number of colleges here. I'd like to think so, and that it's not the *grown-ups*" — she makes quotation marks with her fingers — "who are using."

As special agent in charge in New England, Stansbury's job is to choke off the supply of illegal drugs to the region. DEA agents target traffickers and dealers, seize stashes, make arrests, and testify in court. With 142 federal agents and 100 state and local officers in six states under her command, Stansbury spends her days reviewing plans for raids, developing training programs for personnel, and managing partnerships with local and state law enforcement and other federal agencies. In late July, her office joined with the Boston Police Department and other law enforcement agencies to break up a major crack ring in the city. Last month, DEA agents, along with state and local police, made the largest undercover bust of an ecstasy operation in the eastern US, seizing 150,000 ecstasy pills and a kilogram of methamphetamine in Leominster.

Methamphetamine use exploded in the past decade around the country, but New England seems to have largely sidestepped the scourge, say agents, who fear the drug is becoming more popular here now. It causes special concern, Stansbury says: "Not to give heroin or cocaine any credit, because they put a lot of junk in those, too, but meth is [made from] poison and cold medicine."

While that home-brewed drug is worrisome — it's cheap and highly addictive — its use here is much lower than that of heroin, cocaine, or marijuana, Stansbury says. What frustrates her is the continued demand for illegal drugs. "No matter how many we arrest," she says, "if people continue to make the decision to use drugs, other dealers will continue to fill the void." So one of her top priorities is public education.

A native of Detroit, Stansbury planned to be a social worker but switched her college major to criminal justice to avoid a thorny economics class. While she was still an undergraduate, a friend urged her to apply to the Detroit Police Department. She had no interest,

she says, until she learned the odds — only 10 percent of applicants made it — and had to take the challenge. "By the time they offered me the job, it was like, 'Yes! I am one of Detroit's finest!'"

Stansbury loved police work so much she dropped out of school; if she hadn't been laid off during a city budget crisis in 1979, she says she never would have returned. Stansbury completed her bachelor's degree in 1980 at Wayne State University, then worked as a campus cop at Central Michigan University while also earning her master's degree in counseling there. She joined the DEA in 1983 but returned to school and in 1997 earned a PhD in criminal justice and criminology from the University of Maryland, where her dissertation was on agent ethics and corruption.

Criminal justice professor and author Dorothy Moses Schulz studied successful female police chiefs and sheriffs in the United States for her 2004 book *Breaking the Brass Ceiling*. Schulz says top women cops share striking similarities: They started their careers in the late 1970s or early '80s, usually have no more than two children, and are better educated than their male colleagues, typically holding at least a master's degree. It's a profile Stansbury, who is married and has no children, fits.

Her last post before Boston was in Houston, where she was second in command of the region, and, before that, she was an assistant special agent in New York City. Today, she's one of only two women — and the only African-American woman — to head one of the DEA's 21 field divisions. Women make up less than 10 percent of DEA agents, and African-American women less than 1 percent, she says. But a handful of women are in leadership roles, including the person at the very top, DEA Administrator Karen P. Tandy.

Stansbury's first DEA assignment was working undercover in Baltimore. She had never seen street drugs except during demonstrations at the police academy, but inexperience proved an asset at one of her first buys. When she walked into a drug den with \$8,000 cash, the dealer had brown heroin, which she had never seen before; she thought it was tainted white heroin, a rip-off. "I was like, 'You have to be kidding me! Do you think I'm going to pay you this much money for that?' So he came down on his price." The agents secretly taping the buy got a huge kick out of this, she says — the dealer had offered her a fair price, but she was so convincingly angry while playing the part, she landed a bargain.

Dealers have taken out contracts on her life twice, Stansbury says, after she fooled them as an undercover agent. One was especially angry that she confiscated his Porsche; the other was convinced he would have known she was a cop if she had been a man. But Stansbury, who carries a .40-caliber semi-automatic Sig Sauer P229 handgun wherever she goes, wasn't daunted. And when the FBI tried to woo her away — their agency was safer, they claimed — she turned them down. She was hooked on the work she does at DEA.

"I am really glad I'm doing what I do," she says. "The mission is just so vital, I think it draws me." **EG**

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