

Catfish Turner Is Back, Now Strictly a Dude

By Thomas W. Lippman Washington Post Staff Writer

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Randolph (Catfish) Turner is back in town and back in action.

His battlefield is Washington's narcotics scene, just as it was two decades ago; but nothing else is the same. Now he's on the side of the angels.

In the time of the Korean war, Catfish Turner was the high-living, fast-moving kingpin of the largest heroin-selling ring ever seen in this area.

Now 53 and chastened, he has spent the past year as a job counselor for the United Planning Organization, Washington's antipoverty agency. He will soon become the director of a new UPO experiment in counseling and treating narcotics addicts—a program Turner and a small group of other former convicts thought up and sold to the Department of Labor.

Catfish Turner was a big operator in his heyday. Dealing directly with the syndicate in New York, he bought 25 or 30 ounces of uncut heroin a week, set its local price, distributed it through 14 agents and paid members of the police force for protection.



By Ken Fell—The Washington Post

'CATFISH' TURNER
... to head U.S. project

He lived in a world of Cadillacs, women, Scotch, \$40 hats, \$80 shoes, and casual violence.

It was all well documented at his trial in 1952.

Since, he's been out of town—at the Federal prison in Atlanta, where Judge David A. Pine of U.S. District Court sent him when the roof fell in after a sensational investigation and trial.

"All the time I was there," he said the other day, "I re-

membered what Judge Pine said when he sentenced me. He said if I had put in the same initiative to do something constructive as I did on this illegal thing, I would have been successful. It stayed with me."

He is pushing the new anti-narcotics program, he said, because "I like people, no matter what my past has been. And it's my people who are hurting the most."

Turner said UPO's job coaches found the need to do something about the drug problem when young men who came to them for employment help proved unreliable because they were "strung out."

"We couldn't send an addict on a job, he couldn't function," Turner said. "It wasn't fair to the employer, and it didn't help the addict either. You can't cure them at Lexington or the penitentiaries—they come right back into this environment with no money and they have to go right back to hustling for a living."

So, he said, "UPO called in me and a few others who knew something about it to ask what to do."

The program they drafted is scheduled to go into operation next month. A large house, whose location

Turner refused to divulge, is being renovated and will be used as a "halfway house" staffed by Turner and his colleagues, all former convicts who "had the same problem."

"When they come to us strung out," he said, "if they want help, first we will send them to St. Elizabeths Hospital for detoxification for 60 days. Then we will take them into the house."

There, he said, "we will make the man ready for the world of work." The house will hold up to 45 men at a time, each of whom will stay there six months in isolation from the world outside. They will have no telephones, no visitors, no possible contact with drugs. All they will have is room, board, and the message that they can make it.

Except for its reliance on a non-professional staff, the program is similar in style to others that have made some headway in dealing with addiction in other

areas, such as Dayton in New York, and Synanon. They generally view addiction as a disease, partly physical and partly mental, and not as a crime.

"We believe the junkie must be isolated because he is a baby, even if he's 60 years old," Turner said. "We're going to pave the way for him, try to convince society to give him a chance."

He will walk from this house into a meaningful job, and will always be welcome back. We think it will work."

So do officials of Washington Concentrated Employment Program, who have promised to put up Labor Department money for the program.

Turner grudgingly acknowledges that his own salary is now \$12,240 a year. It was a long road up. He was raised on the streets of Washington, dropping out of school after the fourth grade and living on hustle.

Until his narcotics ring was broken, he had it made in the twilight world of the syndicate.

He now lives in a rooming house on North Capitol Street and works mostly out of a UPO field office at 1000 U st. nw.—just a block from the 9th Street corner where he used to cruise in his first Cadillac a generation ago.