

Detroit Police, Channel 7 face charges in club raid

By Norman Sinclair
Journal Staff Writer

Detroit Police and Channel 7 News are accused of illegally raiding an arts center last spring, falsely arresting the owner and ticketing without cause 200 people.

A federal civil rights lawsuit filed Friday against Detroit, Executive Deputy Chief Benny Napoleon and WXYZ-TV charges that Napoleon and about 30 police officers stormed an arts center on March 15 last year.

Christopher Jaszczak, owner of the center, 1515 Broadway, said officers struck a number of people while brandishing their guns. Jaszczak said he was pushed and hit in the head before he was handcuffed and detained for three hours. Police canceled the arrests 12 days later.

A Channel 7 crew that accompanied police shot pictures, later described on the air as a raid on a "blind pig," slang for illegal after-hours club.

Napoleon did not respond to a call to his office.

According to Walter Craft, Channel 7 news director, "To say we were in complicity with the police is ridiculous. We covered a police raid on an

establishment same as on any other police action. There were 200 people there. We may have been the only camera there but there were other media covering it, too."

The suit charges that police found no illegal activity at the club and that undercover officers earlier had unsuccessfully tried to buy alcohol or drugs there.

Jaszczak said juices and soft drinks were served, and drugs and alcohol were prohibited on the premises. Everyone who attended was over 18.

Jaszczak's lawyer, Michael Haddad, said the center has received national recognition for its contribution to the arts. It has operated for nine years and staged similar parties before without problem.

"We have a right to privacy and security in our homes and businesses," Haddad said. "No one should have to fear that the police will storm our homes with guns drawn, shove us around and stick a Channel 7 news camera in our faces just to build a tough image for the Detroit Police Department."

The case is assigned to U.S. District Judge Avern Cohn.