

39 nailed by sting in Evanston

By Susan Sailer

The owner of a chic Evanston children's clothing shop had been silently fuming at "questionable people" visiting a grimy resale store that had opened next door.

Little did the owner of Hope's Rainbow know that Evanston's first sting, resulting in 39 arrest warrants and \$200,000 worth of drugs and stolen goods, was operating as Kelly's Resale in this gentrifying neighborhood of trendy shops on Custer Ave.

Even yesterday, after learning about the sting, she wasn't pleased. "It was a disgrace in appearance. I was really sick of it. We'd worked so hard to make the neighborhood nice," she said.

But then she didn't know that a dealer in antiquities down the street had been arrested in the operation. Police called him a major Evanston fence.

Eugene S. Bell, owner of the Peeling Ceiling an-

tique store, was arrested in yesterday's early morning roundup of suspects. Many are believed to be members of some of Evanston's five street gangs, police said.

The eight-month sting operation was planned by Evanston Police and the Illinois Division of Criminal Investigation for two years in the wake of growing street gang activity and increasing home burglaries.

The sting ended Sunday, when police arrested two suspected drug dealers at the store, 832 Custer.

Agents said the two tried to sell 3 ounces of cocaine for \$6,000.

By late yesterday, almost three dozen people were in custody in Cook and Lake counties on warrants charging crimes including theft, burglary, conspiracy, unlawful use of weapons and delivery of narcotics.

Two agents of the Illinois Law Enforcement De-



Evanston police take into custody one of the suspects in the suburb's first sting operation.

partment, Dan Callahan and Osborn Curtis, posed as underworld fences.

Wearing old clothes and going for days without shaving, they bought drugs and nearly 500 pieces of loot including cameras, jewelry, stereo equipment and guns, at Kelly's Resale.

The scam was dubbed Operation Gang-Net. Officials said the pair paid \$17,000 for "high quality" cocaine that could be sold on the street

for \$100,000, and \$14,000 for \$100,000 in stolen merchandise.

The illegal sales were videotaped. Twenty-five of those named in the warrants are known as members of Evanston street gangs, said James Gillespie, a deputy police chief.

Many of those arrested "were not very sophisticated" criminals, said William Logan, Evanston police chief. Seventeen charges were

lodged against Wendel Thomas of Evanston, who Gillespie said is a member of the Vice Lords. Curtis Callahan and Curtis said that in the course of their operation, they came into contact with real "fences."

Callahan said he believes that there may be as many as 10 such unlawful operations in Evanston and four in the Main and Chicago area of Evanston, where their undercover store was.

'Sting' loot on display

Evanston police have asked victims of burglaries over the last eight months to view items recovered in yesterday's Operation Gang-Net. They will be shown at the Evanston police station, 1454 Elmwood, tomorrow night and Thursday and Friday nights and all day Saturday.