

Friday Forum

Today's topic: Crack down on vice?
Readers debate whether going after it is the best use of law-enforcement resources.

MBI chief: Part of recipe for great community

In 1978, the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation was created as a joint effort between law enforcement and prosecutors to solve problems relating to organizations engaged in narcotics, vice and other organized criminal businesses.

Eighty-five percent of MBI staff is assigned to narcotics enforcement and 15 percent to vice and organized-crime enforcement. MBI focuses on organized, not street-level, crimes. It is currently comprised of 14 local, state and federal contributing agencies who work hard to make Orange and Osceola counties a better place to live.

Vice investigators do a tremendous job of keeping our community free from the negative influences of the vice culture. This is often a thankless job, because the vice industry is skilled at spinning the facts to confuse

the public.

There is a recipe of things that are healthy for a community and things that are not. Not many people remember the decline of Orange Blossom Trail and the community's image in the late 1970s when the vice industry was taking Orange County by storm with a flood of strip clubs, sex shops and organized prostitution operations. Our community was naive and lacked strong zoning and adult codes, and law enforcement was not coordinated to deal with the influx.

To correct the problem, law-enforcement leaders created the MBI, media exposed the extent of the problem, and government officials created strict zoning and adult-entertainment codes.

MBI's part was to focus on consistent enforcement and creative solutions to rid the community of illegally operating vice businesses. The success of vice investigations cannot be measured by the length of a jail sentence, as vice crimes rarely need lengthy sentences; the goal of vice enforcement is problem-solving.

To solve problems, the MBI uses many strategies, including strict enforcement, seeking cooperation, asking the local media to expose the problem, dropping charges in exchange for cooperation, or reaching a settlement if it solves the community problem.

In spite of claims touted by the vice industry, the MBI has been successful in the prosecution of vice-related

MY
WORD
BY WILLIAM LUTZ

crimes 99 percent of the time and has a 100 percent problem-solving rate (the one escort-service owner who was not convicted closed up shop in our community).

Vice businesses are now regulated, and those that needed to make money from illegal activity have left the community. Longtime Central Florida residents can see the results of the local businesses that have now closed:

- 36 strip clubs
- 61 massage/body scrub parlors
- 11 nude/lingerie performance rooms
- Three adult theaters
- Nine adult video arcades
- 12 improperly zoned adult businesses
- 285 advertised escort services

The remaining 13 licensed adult-entertainment businesses in the community no longer have to compete

with the illegal businesses for customers. The resources necessary to maintain this progress has been reduced to three investigators in a jurisdiction with more than 3,100 sworn officers.

The Central Florida prostitution trade has never been like the movie *Pretty Woman*. The reality is that we have 85 prostitutes documented with HIV, six unsolved murders of prostitutes, and human beings who are degraded and exploited.

In conclusion, it's by recipe, not by accident, that our community has a worldwide image as a clean, tourist-friendly, family-oriented community, free from the influence of widespread vice operators.

The Central Florida community has the recipe right.

William Lutz is director of the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation.