

## *Operation Weekly Shame*

### Excerpts from Synopsis of Affidavit Prosecutive Summary Case Number: MBI-05V-239

Evidence in more than twenty-eight (28) years of investigations by the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation reflects that commercial prostitution in Central Florida primarily takes the form of low-dollar street prostitution, mid-dollar illegal massage parlors that provide sex for money at their business (referred to as "customer (referred to as "out-call") and provide sex for money (referred to as "full service").

Advertising is financially essential to in-call and out-call commercial prostitution as these types of prostitution businesses are not readily visible to customers like street prostitution. Accordingly advertising is the critical element for a prostitution business to exist and expand within a community. Commercial prostitution operations earn large sums of money and are willing to spend large sums to advertise.

Corporations that create obvious categories in their publications for prostitution advertising, and knowingly accept and publish advertising for prostitution not only exploit the women and men engaged in prostitution but facilitate the establishment and growth of prostitution within a community. Those corporations and their employees, similar to the escort service owner or "pimp", profit from the illegal income of prostitution services. Those profits from prostitution include revenue for the corporation generated by the sale of advertisements to prostitution services and for corporation employees who earn commissions as an incentive to sell more advertisements.

Some people mistakenly believe that prostitution is a victimless crime. Prostitution is intertwined with other crimes to include narcotics, thefts, frauds, and robberies. In addition, prostitution creates serious health risks within the community not only for the prostitutes and their customers but potentially for the unsuspecting spouse or girlfriends/boyfriends of customers. Since 2000, 85 prostitutes arrested in Orange County, Florida, have been documented as being HIV positive.

During 1996, an investigation that was called *Operation Do the Right Thing*, focused on the problem of prostitution related advertising disclosed that representatives of the **Orlando Weekly** publication were knowingly selling advertisements for prostitution services. The **Orlando Weekly** is a free entertainment publication which contains "news, views, arts and entertainment" operated by the **Times-Shamrock Communications**, from Scranton, Pennsylvania. In 1997, after being given information about local prostitution and with encouragement from the Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation to stop the practice, the manager of the **Orlando Weekly**, Alisa Cromer, informed the MBI that an executive decision had been made to stop running advertisements for relaxation services, and "similar in-call/out-call businesses." The investigation, which was not disclosed to the **Orlando Weekly**, had identified four (4) **Orlando Weekly** employees who were facilitating prostitution by providing advertising, was inactivated at that time because this agreement was believed to have resolved the

problem. As a result of the **Orlando Weekly**, as well as the *Sprint* and *Bellsouth* yellow pages removing the advertising category that was utilized by prostitution services, more than a hundred advertised escort services disappeared from Central Florida.

During the last several years, however, it has been noted by law enforcement officers, that the **Orlando Weekly** had again significantly increased the prostitution related advertising published in their weekly editions. Accordingly, since 2003, law enforcement officers have made eighty (80) arrests for prostitution connected to advertisements in the **Orlando Weekly**.

As a result of this increase in advertisements for prostitution services, a follow-up investigation called *Operation Weekly Shame* was conducted and undercover officers again visited the **Orlando Weekly** posing as sellers of prostitution services and placed advertisements in the "**Adult Services**" section of the **Orlando Weekly**. The evidence gathered during those visits reflected that the Classified Advertising Director and account executives of the **Orlando Weekly** were engaged in a pattern of illegal activity and that management and employees selling the *Adult Services* advertisements to the undercover officers were aware that prostitutes and illegal massage therapists advertised in the **Orlando Weekly** in order to solicit customers for paid sexual services. Each of the undercover law enforcement officers told the management and employees selling the **Orlando Weekly** advertisements in very certain terms, that they were purchasing advertisements in the **Orlando Weekly** publication's **Adult Services Section** to promote their prostitution businesses.

From the cost of advertisements it was estimated that the **Orlando Weekly** had earned more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  **Million Dollars** over the last five years from advertisements in the *Adult Services Section* and more than  $1 \frac{1}{4}$  **Million Dollars** from advertisements in the *Certified Massage Section*. Law Enforcement has found that some of the massage establishments that advertise in the **Orlando Weekly** are not involved in prostitution. However, law enforcement has never found a person responding from an ad in the *Adult Services Section* that was not involved in prostitution or in violation of Orange County Ordinances regulating escort services.

During the final stages of the investigation the Publisher for the **Orlando Weekly** as well as the Publisher/Owner of the **Orlando Weekly's** parent company **Times-Shamrock Communications** were contacted to determine if they would be willing to again cooperate with law enforcement regarding the problem of prostitution advertisements. The **Orlando Weekly** Publisher did not respond at all, and the telephone response from the **Times-Shamrock Communications** Publisher was that the publication will only respond to subpoenas and no other action will be taken.