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Law Enforcement Cracks Down on Houses of Prostitution in Mercer County

A three-week investigation into houses of prostitution throughout Mercer County concluded last week with five arrests and the seizure of \$2,857, Acting Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported.

Officers with the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, the Mercer County Sheriff's Office, the Ewing, Hamilton, Hopewell Township, Lawrence and Trenton police departments, the New Jersey State Police and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), under the command of Sgt. James Francis, conducted the investigation and made the arrests.

"Law enforcement will not permit these houses of prostitution in Mercer County," Acting Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri said. "We will continue to work with local, state and federal partners to crack down on these illegal businesses that dramatically impact the quality of life for county residents."

During the course of the three-week investigation in three Mercer County municipalities, undercover officers were solicited for sex by women working at the establishments.

On Tuesday, July 28, at approximately 1:30 p.m., officers executed search warrants at Young Spa, 3231 Brunswick Pike, in Lawrence. Two female managers were arrested. Ying Lan Lin, age 34, of Flushing, NY, was charged with promoting prostitution, and Meihua Cui, age 31, of Little Ferry, NJ, was charged with promoting prostitution and engaging in prostitution. A search of the establishment revealed bank records and \$1,430 in cash. Two vehicles belonging to the defendants, a 2014 Nissan Sentra and a 2015 Toyota RAV4, were seized as proceeds related to the business. Both women were released pending future court proceedings.

On Wednesday, July 29, at approximately 3:55 p.m., officers executed search warrants at Bala Bala, 2479 Pennington Avenue, in Hopewell Township. Two females, a manager and an employee, were arrested. Forty-six-year-old Feng Rong Chen, the manager, of Queens, NY, was charged with promoting prostitution. Dan Dan Lu, age 29, was charged with engaging in prostitution. A search of the establishment revealed bank records and \$370. Both women were released pending future court proceedings. Search warrants were executed at Bala Bala in May of this year. At that time, three females were arrested, and more than \$20,000 was seized. The establishment had just recently reopened.

On Thursday, July 30, at approximately 3:35 p.m., officers executed search warrants at Asia Silk Spa, 893 Parkway Avenue, in Ewing. The female manager of the establishment, Zhang Zhanping, age 46, of Flushing, NY, was arrested and charged with promoting prostitution and engaging in prostitution. Bank records and \$1,057 in cash were located throughout the building and in her vehicle. The vehicle, a 2014 Toyota Camry, was seized as proceeds related to the business. Zhanping was released pending future court proceedings.

All three municipal police chiefs expressed their dedication to keeping their communities safe.

- “The Lawrence Township Police Department will not tolerate an individual or business engaging in illegal activity in the township,” Chief Mark Ubry said. “I do not agree with the argument that prostitution is a victimless crime. We have experienced some serious crimes, such as robbery, aggravated assault and thefts, centered on the crime of prostitution. We will continue to take an active role in developing intelligence and working with the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office and HSI agents to help combat prostitution from occurring in our community.”
- “The Hopewell Township Police Department would like to thank the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office for their assistance in the effort to rid Hopewell Township of this type of illegal activity,” Chief Lance Maloney said. “Our police department will remain responsive to our citizens and will continue to assist in the prosecution of these cases to maintain the quality of life that our residents expect.”
- “As with all crimes, the Ewing Police Department will aggressively investigate crimes related to prostitution,” Chief John P. Stemler III said. “It’s unconscionable that they would run such a business so close to a school. Thankfully, the swift operation of this joint investigation was able to shut it down before the school year began. We are happy to partner with the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office and police departments throughout the county to ensure a successful conclusion.”

Promoting prostitution is a third-degree offense carrying a penalty of three to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$15,000. Engaging in prostitution is a disorderly persons offense.

Despite having been charged, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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