

Pasco department hired girls, 17 and 18, as drug informants

JOY MORGAN
Petersburg Times Staff Writer
64, St. Petersburg Times

As part of a drug investigation, the Pasco County Sheriff's Department once installed a 17-year-old runaway and her 18-year-old friend in a mobile home, where the girls sometimes traded sex for drugs.

The mother of the 17-year-old girl had already reported the runaway as a runaway and had asked the Sheriff's Department for help in finding the girl, a juvenile. Meanwhile, the mobile home was being used in the investigation without her parents' knowledge.

The two young women lived for several months without adult supervision in a mobile home in Odessa, and neighbors complained repeatedly about their conduct.

The 1980 drug investigation, and the role of the young women in it, are now being investigated by Pinellas-Pasco County Attorney James T. Russell. Under Florida law, it is a



crime to cause a person under 18 to become or remain a delinquent child.

Investigators have questioned several people involved in the case, and Russell has subpoenaed Sheriff's Department records. Russell also wrote a letter to Pasco Sheriff John M. Short, warning him to stay out of the state attorney's investigation.

Sheriff Short and deputies who took part in the investigation have consistently declined to answer questions

about the case from the *St. Petersburg Times*.

NEVERTHELESS, public records and interviews with other people involved in the case provide details about the way the young women worked on behalf of the Pasco department. For example:

✓ **Sex for drugs.** A man who was arrested after he gave marijuana and Quaaludes to one of the girls says the two young women offered him sex in return for the drugs. The younger of the two women confirmed this and said her friend was also having sexual relations with one of the sheriff's detectives.

✓ **Millionaire deputy.** John Moorman, a millionaire who is a close associate of the sheriff and who works part-time as a deputy, played a key role in the investigation. He paid rent and utility bills for the mobile home, and after one arrest, Moorman gave the young women a personal check for \$1,000 so they could buy a second-hand Volkswagen.

✓ **Travel agency.** One of the men arrested in the case owned a travel agency in the town of Zephyrhills, but he says he had to sell it after his felony conviction. Sheriff Short later moved his own travel agency to Zephyrhills, then sold the business to Deputy Moorman.

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The runaway girl in the case, now 21, works as a waitress and dancer at a nude bar in another state. She goes by the nickname "Candie." She told the *Times* last week that she became involved with the Sheriff's Department after she got in trouble at home, and Deputy Joe Moore offered to help her.

Her mother, a Pasco County businesswoman, told the *Times* she did not know her daughter was being used as a drug informant.

Records at the Sheriff's Department show that the

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Girls from 1-B

mother reported her daughter as a runaway on June 15, 1981. Court files reveal that she worked as a drug informant for the Sheriff's Department on July 19, 1980, just three weeks later. (See illustration, 12-B.)

"She was in the drug scene and a runaway," the mother said. "She was a gifted child, and then somebody got her on drugs. We were just worried parents who spent a lot of nights crying and worrying about where we went wrong."

The mother said she thought some of the deputies knew where her daughter was, and the mother attempted unsuccessfully to reach Sheriff Short to complain.

The mother of the other woman said she knew her daughter was working with the detectives. She said Deputy Moore was "an old family friend."

WHILE THEY WORKED with the sheriff's deputies, the two young women lived in a lakefront mobile home in Odessa, which is about 10 miles southeast of New Port Richey. The mobile home was owned by Moore's brother Paul.

Residents who lived nearby say they were very unhappy during the months that the two unsupervised women lived in the neighborhood.

An Odessa couple who live next door to the mobile home on Fussell Hollow Road said the two young women offered their 14-year-old daughter Quaaludes while the teenagers were working for the Sheriff's Department.

When they tried to complain to Sheriff Short, Mr. and Mrs. Del Cates said they were told by Moore that the girls were civilian "narc" who were helping solve the area's drug problem.

Moore explained that the offer of drugs to their daughter was part of a plan to see who was selling drugs, the couple said.

"It was hell," Cates told a reporter recently. "We tried to complain to the Sheriff's Department. I called Sheriff Short, but he would never return my call. I tried to get the FBI out here, but they said they couldn't do anything."

Candie said sheriff's deputies encouraged the young women to solicit drugs with promises of sex.

Art Young, 54, the owner of the travel agency, was one

Other law enforcement agencies reached by the Times said they generally forbid the use of juveniles in such investigations and have strict rules that prohibit confidential informants from distributing drugs or offering sex in exchange for drugs.

of the men eventually arrested. In a letter to a Times reporter, he said the 17-year-old girl and her friend "went to bed with half the guys that were arrested, including me."

He said the girls threw parties and asked for drugs from those who showed up, promising sex in return. Those who delivered wound up being arrested several months later on charges of delivering drugs to a minor.

It is not clear how many men eventually were arrested, but the young women were listed as witnesses in cases against four persons: two teen-age boys from Dade City, a 25-year-old bricklayer from Odessa and Young.

In each of those four cases, the young women accepted a small amount of marijuana or Quaaludes from the defendant. All four defendants were released on probation, including Young.

Candie also said that during the investigation, one sheriff's detective was having sex with the 18-year-old woman in the case.

OTHER LAW ENFORCEMENT agencies reached by the Times said they generally forbid the use of juveniles in such investigations and have strict rules that prohibit confidential informants from distributing drugs or offering sex in exchange for drugs.

The Pasco County Sheriff's Department had no written procedure for dealing with informants in drug cases and no policy about the use of juveniles as informants at the time of the investigation.

Gil Thivener, the department's director of operations at the time of the Pasco investigation, said Friday that he did not know anything about the informants until the Times and state attorney Russell started asking questions.

Thivener recently resigned from the department and now plans to run for election against Short, his former boss (Story, 13-B).

"I know now that Short went directly to (Lt. James) Brady and directed him to get with Jim Moore and John Moorman and handle the investigation," Thivener said.

Candie said that during the investigation, Moore introduced her and the other young woman to John Moorman, a millionaire part-time deputy who lived near Moore.

"I don't know what John Moorman has to do with the Pasco County sheriff's office," Candie said. "I think he must be financing the whole department."

Indeed, Moorman provided some of the money for another Sheriff's Department investigation, dubbed Operation CUP (Clean Up Pasco). Moorman receives no salary from the Sheriff's Department, working whatever hours he



Pasco Sheriff John M. Short has been warned by the state attorney to stay out of an investigation into the department's 1980 operation.

chooses. He bought his own uniform, gun and patrol car.

Candie said Moorman promised the young women "everything" if they would help "get" Art Young, the owner of the Zephyrhills travel agency who was later charged with delivering marijuana and Quaaludes to her.

"Moorman had a real grudge against Young, but I don't know why," Candie said.

After Young was arrested, Moorman gave the young women a check for about \$1,000 so they could buy a car. They bought a 1971 Volkswagen that had been parked in the front yard of a house on State Road 54 near New Port Richey.

Two detectives accompanied the girls to buy the car, according to Arthur Price, who says he let a friend's son park the car in his yard so he could sell it. The documents transferring the title to the car were notarized by Dana Brady. She works in the department's civil division, and her husband James was a sergeant in the sheriff's special enforcement unit. He has since been promoted to lieutenant.

Young was placed on probation in April 1981 after he pleaded no contest to a series of charges stemming from his involvement with the two Young women.

At the time of his arrest in September 1980, Young was the owner and operator of Vacabond Travel Agency in Zephyrhills, on the east side of Pasco County. He said he lost business to his competitors after the publicity about his arrest, and he had to sell the travel agency because of his felony conviction.

Sheriff Short opened his own travel agency in Port Richey, on the west side of Pasco County, in January 1981. He moved the agency to Zephyrhills in December 1981 and sold it to Moorman in March 1982.

Young questioned the relationship of the travel agencies and his arrest, noting that the man responsible for his arrest wound up operating a travel agency in the town where he did business.

"Isn't there some kind of law that it's illegal to use minors in entrapment?" Young asked a Times reporter.

A few months later, Young was again the target of a sheriff's investigation, and yet another young woman working as an informant said Young gave her a few puffs on a marijuana cigarette.

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Girls from 12-B

In January 1983 a jury found Young innocent of delivering marijuana to the second informant but convicted him of possessing a single marijuana cigarette.

As a result of the second charge, Young's probation was violated, and he was sentenced in early 1983 to four years in prison.

As for the two young women in the case, they apparently have chosen different paths.

Candie now works in a bar where nude dancers with painted, plastic smiles bend and sway to the blare of rock music. Men gather around to slip dollar bills into their garters.

In the club, Candie hustles drinks and collects her tips in a gold-sequined garter.

Candie said her first steps on the road to this place were taken in Pasco County, and she blames the Sheriff's Department.

"The sheriff's office wrecked my life," she said. Candie lives in another state and says she is afraid that others will find her and cause her problems. "I can't go home, and I still hate cops."

In the 3½ years since she worked for the Sheriff's Department, Candie has worked as a dancer and was arrested twice in Tampa on prostitution charges.

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Candie talked about her experience with obvious re-

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luctance. She said her mother and her attorney have urged her to remain silent.

"They've done enough to my life," Candie said as she described her dealings with the Sheriff's Department. "I was in trouble, and they made a lot of promises to me. They pumped my head full of s---. I was so young I really didn't understand what they had me doing."

"I was having trouble with my parents and wanted to run away," she said.

The other woman in the case, now 22, has since married and lives in Tampa with a husband who knows nothing about her past. When contacted recently, she said she was afraid to talk to a reporter because her husband might discover details of her work for the Pasco Sheriff's Department.

The woman's mother told the *Times*, "It's a part of her life she wants to forget."

Former Pasco major will challenge Short

A version of this story appears in some Times regional editions.

By BRADLEY STERTZ
St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

NEW PORT RICHEY — Gil Thivener, who resigned April 27 as major of operations in the Pasco County Sheriff's Department, announced Saturday that he will be a Democratic candidate for sheriff this fall.

"Despite the wild rumors circulating, I had no intention of seeking the office of sheriff," Thivener said in a prepared statement. But "my phone rang incessantly with calls from citizens congratulating me on my courage to give up my job and requesting me to run for sheriff."

Thivener, 49, is the second Democrat to announce his candidacy for the sheriff's election in November. Sheriff John M. Short has not announced whether he will run again on the Democratic slate. The other Democratic candidate is Eddie L. Hines, the former Saint Leo-San Antonio police chief.

Republicans running for the post are former Florida Department of Law Enforcement agent Manny Funes, former Tampa police officer Jim Gillum and Harry J. Martin, a retired Detroit narcotics detective.

Thivener noted in his announcement that he is a graduate of the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Va., earned a degree in criminal justice at Saint Leo College and worked as police chief in St. Petersburg Beach for seven years.

Thivener also worked as an investigator for the Pinellas-Pasco state attorney's office from 1966 to 1970, and as a deputy for the Pinellas County Sheriff's Department from 1960 to 1966.



Gil Thivener was one of the highest-ranking officials in the Pasco County Sheriff's Department before he resigned April 27.

Before his resignation, Thivener was one of the highest-ranking officers in the Pasco department. Initially he was hired by Short to run the department's correctional facilities. Within a few months he was promoted to command overall operations.

In 1976, Thivener ran unsuccessfully as a Republican for Pinellas County sheriff. He changed parties when he went to work for Short, who is a Democrat.

"I am not a politician, I'm a professional police administrator," Thivener said in his announcement. "The office of sheriff is there to keep Pasco citizens safe from the criminal element. The office of sheriff is not a political tool to further anyone's personal ambitions."

"Pasco County residents deserved better management than Short has been providing, and I am going to run against him to see if we can turn this county's law enforcement agency into something we can all be proud of."