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2 Policemen Accused of Taking Bribes to Protect Queens Brothel

By WILLIAM K. RASHBAUM and MICHELLE O'DONNELL
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It is one of the oldest forms of police corruption: taking money to look the other way.

And that is what two veteran police officers were doing in Flushing, Queens, federal authorities said yesterday. They looked the other way, the officials said, while a brothel took in more than \$1 million a year from customers who streamed in from shiny late-model cars double-parked outside.

Inside the stucco and brick building, across the street from a cemetery, 16 women, many of whom officials believe paid thousands to come to the United States from South Korea and China, worked as prostitutes behind windows obscured by pink or maroon satin fabric. But the two officers did not take much money: one accepted just several hundred dollars, the other the discounted services of the house, according to court papers.

And they did more than just look away. Prosecutors charge that they helped shut down the brothel's competitors, essentially using the information they had gleaned in their illicit relationship with one criminal enterprise to burnish their reputations as policemen by working to shut down others.

But unknown to them, another officer was in their midst -- an undercover vice detective whose work was part of a 10-month investigation of the brothel with which they were connected, the authorities said. It was during that sting operation that the authorities said they learned that the two veteran officers, assigned to the 109th Precinct, were willing to take bribes.

Yesterday, the F.B.I., the police, the United States Attorney in Brooklyn and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents announced the arrests of the two officers, Dennis Kim, 29, and Jerry Svoronos, 30; the woman and man accused of running the brothel, Gina Kim and Geeho Chae, both 37; and 16 young women believed to have worked there as prostitutes.

It was the largest sex and bribes-for-protection scandal in the New York City Police Department since more than a dozen officers were implicated nearly a decade ago for protecting a brothel on Manhattan's West Side and using it, essentially, as a clubhouse while they were on duty.

Agents raided the three-story brothel at 57-24 164th Street late Wednesday, and the home

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that Mr. Chae and Ms. Kim, who was not related to the arrested officer, shared at 149-24 Roosevelt Avenue, the officials said. At the home and in the couple's car, the authorities recovered roughly \$800,000 that they believe was income from the brothel's operation.

The arrests and the raid in a quiet residential section of Flushing opened a window to what some called a thriving community of brothels in the largely Chinese and South Korean community. One man who said he was a client of the shuttered establishment said that the existence of brothels was well known in the area, and that each has its own practices, regulations and pricing systems, like charging more for customers who come from South Korea than those who come from China.

It is a lucrative trade, according to an affidavit supporting the arrest warrants sworn out by F.B.I. Special Agent Won Yoon. In a secretly recorded conversation, Ms. Kim told the undercover detective that, on the day the brothel opened on May 18, 2005, she had 20 customers each paying \$200, earning \$4,000 that single day. The brothel's first location was at 43-53 162nd Street, and later moved to 164th Street, the affidavit said.

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The undercover detective met with the brothel operators 17 times in Queens, at diners, a Starbucks, a Dunkin' Donuts and in parking lots, and they gave him twice-monthly payments of \$6,000, plus additional money for raiding their competitors, according to the affidavit. In all, they paid him \$126,500.

But the bribes seemed to be just a cost of doing business in the sex-trafficking trade; Agent Yoon estimated that the brothel earned more than \$1.1 million over the 41 weeks it was in operation.

And Officer Kim, who admitted accepting several hundred dollars in bribes, also profited in another way, using information to make other arrests. "I wanted to be the number one cop, you know?" he admitted in a conversation with Agent Yoon. "Because I wasn't making sergeant. You know I wasn't smart enough." Yesterday, the two officers, looking haggard, appeared before United States Magistrate Judge Viktor V. Pohorelsky, who released them on \$250,000 bond each.

The judge ordered them not to associate with the three other officers with whom they had worked in the 109th Precinct "Conditions Unit," which focuses on quality of life problems, including prostitution. The prosecutor in the case, Assistant United States Attorney Steven H. Breslow, would not say whether other officers in the unit were also under investigation, adding that the inquiry was continuing.

A lawyer for Officer Svoronos, Joseph L. Conway, said his client played a peripheral role in the case. "He was a good, solid police officer with numerous arrests during his career on the force," Mr. Conway said. Julia L. Gatto, Mr. Kim's lawyer, declined to comment.

Judge Pohorelsky issued a permanent order of detention against the accused brothel operators, both South Korean citizens, after Mr. Breslow said they had access to extremely large amounts of cash and travel documents. Lawyers for the two declined comment.

Along 162nd Street, the man who identified himself as a former client of the brothel said that the Korean system of prostitution in New York City was tightly managed. In a Korean brothel, the man, 28, said, only Korean and Chinese men were allowed in. He said that when he patronized the brothel at 53-43 162nd Street two years ago, there were two prices in place, for some unexplained reason: \$150 for Chinese patrons, and \$200 for Koreans.

He said that some of the women became involved with prostitution because they owed up to \$100,000 to smugglers who brought them to the United States. "They're sold to someone in America, and they have to work that debt off so they can be free," he said.

Photos: Officer Jerry Svoronos, left, and his lawyer, Joseph L. Conway, and Officer Dennis Kim, and his lawyer, Julia L. Gatto, outside court yesterday. (Photographs by Jonathan Fickies for The New York Times)(pg. B6); This brothel in Flushing took in \$1 million in a year, officials say. (Photo by Richard Lee for The New York Times)(pg. B1)

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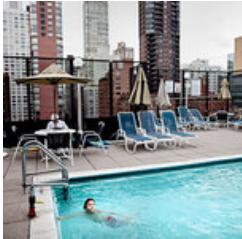
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