

## Cop ran Pleasant Hill brothel, co-defendant says

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**(05-12) 17:31 PDT PLEASANT HILL** -- A Concord private investigator at the center of a law enforcement scandal admits he helped run a house of prostitution in Pleasant Hill, but says the former commander of a Contra Costa County anti-drug task force was the architect of the operation and shut down competing brothels, the investigator's attorney said Thursday.

Christopher Butler, 49, leased office space for a massage parlor on Gregory Lane in Pleasant Hill beginning in summer 2009 at the request of then-state narcotics agent Norman Wielsch, 50, said Butler's attorney, William Gagen.

Wielsch and Butler were friends who once served on the Antioch police force together. Now they are co-defendants in a case charging them with stealing drugs from law enforcement evidence lockers.

Wielsch is the one who came up with the idea for the brothel after learning the business from years of shutting them down, Gagen said.

"When Wielsch busted those places, he saw firsthand all the cash they took in," Gagen said. "So he came up with the plan - he knew how to run the business and he knew he could keep the competitors away. He just needed someone to lease a space for him."

### Wielsch denial

Gagen spoke after KPIX-TV reported Wednesday that Butler had admitted his role in the operation to prosecutors, which prompted Wielsch's attorney to tell several media outlets that his client was not involved.

The attorney, Michael Cardoza, told The Chronicle that Wielsch had "nothing to do with starting, running or protecting a brothel."

He characterized Butler's admission as an effort to reduce whatever time he may serve in prison by shifting blame to Wielsch.

"Butler is spinning tales to save himself," Cardoza said. "He'd rat out his mother and father if he had to."

Gagen said Wielsch had told Butler to lease the spot in a small office park at 670 Gregory Lane and employ a



36-year-old Oakland woman to manage the brothel. Court records in unrelated criminal cases show that Wielsch had arrested the woman for prostitution when he headed the multi-agency Central Contra Costa Narcotics Enforcement Team.

The attorney said Butler had made weekly cash collections from the woman and delivered the money to Wielsch, though he did not say how much.

"It didn't do as well as they'd hoped," Gagen said. The brothel closed sometime last year, he said.

When the parlor attracted the attention of neighboring tenants who complained to Wielsch's task force, Gagen said, Wielsch sent an agent to investigate - but only after he provided a photograph of the agent to Butler and the female manager to make sure the undercover officer received a legitimate massage.

"That solved their problem for the time being," Gagen said.

Wielsch also arranged raids on competing massage parlor-brothels to cut down on the competition, Gagen said.

### **String of cases**

The accusations are the latest aimed at Wielsch and Butler, who were arrested Feb. 16 after investigators said Wielsch stole drugs from evidence lockers and passed them on to the private eye. The men pleaded not guilty to drug and theft charges.

Butler was later charged with bribing a Contra Costa County sheriff's deputy to make drunken-driving arrests of men he was investigating, so-called "dirty DUI" stings. Butler has admitted to arranging the arrests, according to interview transcripts released by the district attorney's office.

On March 17, Butler submitted a 36-page statement to investigators that outlined many of his alleged illegal practices, including his and Wielsch's role in the Pleasant Hill brothel.

### **San ramon cop**

According to those familiar with the document, Butler also alleged that Louis Lombardi, a San Ramon police officer who worked under Wielsch on the task force, was aware of the massage parlor's true purpose.

Lombardi, 38, was arrested May 4 on felony charges that he sold drugs seized from raids, stole guns and embezzled cash. He is due to be arraigned today. His attorney did not respond to a message.

Prosecutors are deciding whether to file pimping charges against Wielsch and Butler, and the district attorney's office has granted immunity to the Oakland woman who said she oversaw the brothel, The Chronicle has learned. Prosecutors did not respond to requests for comment Thursday.

According to court records, Wielsch's task force arrested the woman for prostitution in Walnut Creek in July 2009, and after Wielsch's intervention, the charge was reduced to a misdemeanor for disturbing the peace.

Cardoza, Wielsch's attorney, acknowledged that his client had helped the woman get the charges reduced. He said it was in exchange for her testimony against her two alleged pimps.

### **Cases dropped**

The woman never had to testify. In March, prosecutors dropped 12 cases connected to Wielsch, including the case against the two alleged pimps.

The woman told The Chronicle that she had been interviewed by state investigators and the district attorney's office, but declined to comment further. The Chronicle is not naming her because she has not been charged with a crime.

David Atkinson, a chiropractor whose office is located across from the now-vacant massage parlor, said he had complained to Pleasant Hill police about the scantily clad women who entered "My Divine Skin" after normal business hours. He said the police had referred him to the regional anti-prostitution task force - which was headed by Wielsch.

### **Mug shots**

Atkinson had forgotten about the business until three weeks ago, when he said he was interviewed by two agents from the state Department of Justice who questioned him about the operation and told him Wielsch was involved.

Atkinson said the agents had shown him mug shots of the women who worked there to try to identify the prostitutes.

"They looked a lot different," Atkinson said. "When I saw them, they were all dressed up."

Pleasant Hill Police Chief Peter Dunbar said records showed that an officer had responded to a complaint at the address, but had been told by a woman there that the business was Butler's private-investigation firm.

Dunbar said it was protocol to refer prostitution reports to Wielsch's regional task force because Pleasant Hill's department does not have a vice unit.

"We're a small department," Dunbar said. "We referred these problems to people we thought were going to look into them."

### **Contra costa cases**

Cases connected to the former commander of a Contra Costa County anti-drug task force and a private

investigator from Concord.

**Drug theft: Norman Wielsch**, 50, commander of the multi-agency Central Contra Costa Narcotics Enforcement Team, and former colleague on the Antioch police force **Christopher Butler**, 49, now a private investigator, were arrested Feb. 16 on drug charges. Prosecutors say Wielsch stole confiscated drugs from law enforcement evidence lockers and passed them to Butler to be sold. Wielsch, who has resigned his position with the state Department of Justice, and Butler have pleaded not guilty.

**'Dirty DUIs':** Contra Costa prosecutors filed charges in April accusing Butler and a county sheriff's deputy, **Stephen Tanabe**, of working together to make drunken-driving arrests of men whose wives had hired Butler during divorce proceedings. Butler allegedly employed women to get the men drunk, then try to get them to drive. The idea was to damage the men's prospects in child custody hearings, prosecutors say. Butler and Tanabe have pleaded not guilty. Tanabe has resigned from the Sheriff's Office.

**San Ramon cop:** On May 4, San Ramon police Officer **Louis Lombardi**, 38, who worked under Wielsch on the county anti-drug squad, was charged with collaborating with Butler and Wielsch to sell stolen drugs and commit other crimes. He is scheduled to be arraigned today.

**Richmond connection:** Two former members of the Richmond Police Department's Explorers program say that when they complained about two officers who recruited them for their own security outfit, one of the officers hired Butler to try to set up one of the young men on a drunken-driving arrest. The officer, Ray Thomas, denied doing so. He and Officer Danny Harris, who have sued the department for alleged discrimination, have resigned.

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