

## **Former Memphis officer going to trial on charges of driving women to Miss. for prostitution By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press September 13, 2013 - 5:53 pm EDT A A A**

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MEMPHIS, Tennessee — A federal judge on Friday set a trial date for a former Memphis police officer accused of driving women to a party at a north Mississippi hotel so they could strip and perform sex acts.

U.S. District Judge S. Thomas Anderson set an Oct. 7 trial date for Sean McWhirter. His lawyer, federal public defender David Bell, said he has reviewed some recently turned-over evidence and McWhirter has decided to go to trial. Bell declined to discuss the nature of the evidence.

McWhirter has pleaded not guilty to charges of prostitution-related racketeering, transporting individuals for prostitution and lying to federal agents. He was charged and arrested in September 2012, and he has resigned from the Memphis Police Department.

If convicted on all charges, he could face up to 20 years in prison.

McWhirter's case was investigated by the federal Tarnished Badge Task Force, which targets officers engaged in alleged misconduct. Critics of the department pointed to McWhirter's case and others as examples of a lack of discipline among officers.

About 25 Memphis officers have been arrested on, or convicted of, misconduct-related charges since January 2012.

After McWhirter's arrest, police Director Toney Armstrong said his department helped in the case and will work to remove lawbreakers from the department.

McWhirter is the second former Memphis officer to appear in court this week in a case with Mississippi ties. Alex Beard pleaded guilty Tuesday in state court to vehicular homicide in a crash that killed a mother and daughter from Senatobia, Mississippi. He had faced six years in prison if convicted, but he was sentenced to six months in jail under a plea deal criticized by the victims' relatives.

Records show Beard was going 94 mph seconds before the crash and did not have his lights or siren on.

According to an FBI complaint, a source told agents that McWhirter announced at a nightclub that three women he was with belonged to him and they were available to club patrons.

The informant told the FBI that McWhirter performed a sex act with one of the women in full view of other people at a nightclub Nov. 12, 2011, according to the complaint written by FBI Special Agent Matthew Ross.

"This event was video and audio recorded by the source," Ross wrote.

The source spoke with McWhirter 10 months later and asked if he could provide girls for a party. McWhirter said it would cost about \$50 for each girl, the complaint said.

FBI agents said McWhirter took payment while he was on duty and in a patrol car. McWhirter later drove the unidentified women to a hotel in Tunica, Mississippi, where several casino-hotels are located, the complaint said.

McWhirter was arrested at the hotel. One of the women told agents that McWhirter drove her there to strip and engage in prostitution, the FBI said.

Phone records showed McWhirter had been in daily contact with women who advertised on backpage.com, the complaint said.

"Your affiant knows through experience in human trafficking investigations that backpage.com is commonly used as an advertisement website for prostitution," Ross wrote.

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