

CALIFORNIA

Brothel Thrived 3 Blocks From Police Station

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The Van Nuys bordello, grossing \$30,000 a month, was equipped with closed-circuit television to screen arriving customers and a video cassette recorder to play pornographic movies. The names of 250 customers, and their sexual preferences, were punched into a computer. The prostitutes carried beepers as they made outcalls to clients.

It was a sophisticated operation, but what really surprised Los Angeles Police Department vice officers was the bordello's location: three blocks from the Van Nuys police station.

What surprised them even more was who ran the business: a mother and daughter.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Vice Officer Bradley Berman said. “It was in walking distance from the station, and it was the most elaborate operation I’ve seen.”

On Wednesday, mother and daughter were sentenced in Van Nuys Superior Court to jail terms. Rosemary Williams, 43, a former clerk for Los Angeles County Superior Court, received a 30-day term. Her daughter, 24-year-old Rene Chanel LeBlanc, a part-time student at a local computer programming school, got 90 days.

Clients Solicited Through Ads

Each pleaded guilty to a charge of fraudulent inducement to prostitution.

Berman said the bordello, which employed up to eight women at a time, operated June through December out of the upstairs portion of a warehouse in the 14200 block of Bessemer Street. Clients were solicited through advertisements placed in sexually oriented publications that promised private screenings of pornographic films.

Prostitutes were hired by LeBlanc, who acted as the madam at the brothel, police said. The prostitutes split their daily earnings with either LeBlanc or Williams, who picked up the operation’s receipts at the end of each working day, according to a court document.

Williams did not work as a prostitute, police said.

LeBlanc maintained a computer list at her North Hollywood home naming customers, their sexual preferences and the amount paid for previous services, Berman said. The mother-daughter team accepted some charge cards, he said.

Prospective clients entered the bordello by walking up a stairway, where they were filmed by a closed-circuit TV camera, Berman said. The minimum fee upon entry was \$100, which did not include any sexual acts, he said.

Men were escorted to one of three bedrooms, where they viewed pornographic movies and then were joined by a “hostess,” Berman said. An intercom system and peepholes allowed LeBlanc to monitor activities in the rooms, he said.

Police said they were tipped off to the ring after vice officers arrested a prostitute who told authorities, in exchange for immunity from prosecution, of the workings of the operation.

LeBlanc and Williams were arrested in February after police staked out the warehouse.

Agreement With D.A.

In an agreement with the district attorney’s office, both pleaded guilty last month to fraudulent inducement to prostitution, a form of pimping and pandering. They faced a maximum of 16 months in prison.

Berman said the bordello attracted between 10 and 15 patrons a day. The operation grossed up to \$30,000 a month, including proceeds from an out-call service, in which prostitutes with telephone beepers were sent to private homes, prosecutor Norman Montrose said.

Leniency Asked

Attorney Marla Wolfe, who represented Williams, termed the mother's activity "messengering for her daughter" in asking the court for leniency. She said Williams "had to do what she thought necessary to help her daughter."

Williams had no criminal record and was employed for 10 years as a court clerk until she had a nervous breakdown in 1972, according to a probation report. She is undergoing counseling by a minister, the report said.

Attorney Bruce Wolfe, who represented LeBlanc, said that although his client had acted as a prostitute, she "is trying to turn her life around," having recently "enrolled in a computer school."

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