

Neighbors

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Speedway racer
nationals-bound

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Jon Williams/Neighbors

Flying flags

Khounseck Bouansana, Alyce Norman Elementary second-grader, winds a Rumanian flag as classmate Deanna Gonzales waits for a parade to begin.

Students dressed up as Olympic athletes for a processional around the school last week that included a Dixieland band.

Prostitute crackdown hampered

• Police officers have more leeway in catching 'johns.' See Page 14.

By Vicky Boyd
Neighbors staff writer

The West Sacramento Police Department's effort to crack down on prostitution is being hampered by an overcrowded county jail, varied sentencing by area judges and a continuing influx of prostitutes from Sacramento.

Nevertheless, the police department is continuing weekly sweeps of prostitutes and their customers along West Sacramento Avenue, which has had a long-standing problem with prostitution.

"We want to make it so uncomfortable for them out there that they don't want to stay," Police Chief Barry Kalar said.

During the prostitute operations, officers arrest an average of 10 women and 10 male customers, or "johns," during a four-hour period.

Once arrested, prostitutes are taken to Yolo County Jail in Woodland, where they are given a notice to appear and released.

Because of overcrowding, the jail usually doesn't book people arrested on misdemeanor charges, such as prostitution, said Lt. Stan Rommel of the Yolo County Sheriff's Department.

"If you look at the total inmate population at the facility and you are at the point of trying to maintain a constitutional jail, are you going to release a hard-core felon or are you going to release a prostitute?" said Rommel, who manages both the Yolo County Main and Branch jails.

As soon as the prostitutes are given a notice to appear, Farmer said, they are out and working West Capitol Avenue again.

West Sacramento officers arrested a known prostitute along West Capitol Avenue at 3 p.m. July 20 and another undercover officer arrested her at 9 p.m. the same night, Farmer said. Since April, officers have arrested the woman eight times on prostitution and drug charges.

The same prostitute was sentenced to more than 200 days of jail time earlier this

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Residents ask city to close bathhouse

By Vicky Boyd
Neighbors staff writer

Although a West Sacramento bathhouse is operating within county and city regulations, neighbors of the facility don't like living near the only operating public bathhouse in the Sacramento area.

"There may be a place for it somewhere, but it doesn't seem like it's right for a family neighborhood," said Bryte resident Ione

Cagle.

Cagle and about a dozen neighbors of Club Baths of Sacramento have asked the West Sacramento City Council and the police department to close the business.

A draft ordinance, governing the establishment and operating of adult entertainment, has been introduced to the Planning Commission.

The ordinance would limit adult enter-

tainment to commercial zones and would give the Planning Commission the authority to grant or deny the necessary permits needed to operate.

Although Club Baths at 1537 Sacramento Ave. has been under the scrutiny of both the city and Yolo County, officials say they are not sure what to do with the situation.

The police department does not have the

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Four on school board may face recall

By Vicky Boyd
Neighbors staff writer

Upset about the way four Washington School Board members handled recent personnel matters, a group of West Sacramento residents has started legal steps to recall Joe Meier, Jim Koerwitz, Irene Eklund and Roy Snider.

A group supporting the actions of the four-member majority has countered by beginning the process needed to recall board members Susan Carter, Linda Brooks and John Siden.

Boyd Stockdale, a member of the group seeking to recall the four-member majority, said he decided to pursue a recall because the four members have created confusion

within the community and district.

One of the biggest issues is the May firing by the four-member majority of Gus Viecelli, who remains on administrative leave, Stockdale said.

Only two months earlier, the school board had given Viecelli a good review.

Viecelli still has nearly three years remaining on his contract, which is worth more than \$260,000.

In the interim, the four-member majority replaced Viecelli with Assistant Superintendent Phil Crawford, whose contract the school board decided not to renew in March.

The school board paid \$30,000 to Crawford in June for a promise not to take any legal actions against the district.

"The four-member majority has behaved

in a way that has now cast in people's minds their inability to provide leadership to education," said Stockdale, whose two children graduated from Washington schools.

Stockdale also said he was concerned about the financial well-being of the district, since it was never rich and now may have to buy out the remaining portion of Viecelli's contract.

"I don't know where they will get that money out of the district, but it's probably going to be from teachers' salaries and supplies," Stockdale said.

Eustace Morley, a West Sacramento resident for more than 40 years, said she decided

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Crackdown

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year and released after 18 days because of overcrowding, Kalar said.

If police departments are constantly arresting the same prostitute, Rommel said, he is willing to work with them to ensure that the prostitute is booked into the jail and that the posting of bail be required for release.

Bail for a prostitution charge is \$500 or \$1,500 if the person has a record.

But Rommel said police departments must call and let him know they are bringing in habitual offenders they want held.

"We are trying to work with the police departments about not sending nuisance-type misdemeanors out there," Rommel said.

Once the new jail is completed this fall at the corner of Gibson Road and County Road 102 in Woodland, Kalar said, overcrowding will no longer be a problem and the jail will be able to hold prostitutes until they post bail.

Yolo County District Attorney Dave Henderson said his office prosecutes prostitutes who appear in court to the fullest extent allowed by law.

"Our position is we don't have the alternative to treat them with any kind of leniency," Henderson said. "Sacramento is making a big push on prostitutes and if we treat them nicely, they will keep on coming (to Yolo County)."

Both Kalar and Henderson said West Sacramento is the only city in the county that

has a problem with streetwalkers.

Kalar said he is working to ensure that all judges within Yolo County levy the same penalties on convicted prostitutes.

"We are trying to get the judges to sit down and agree that there is a problem," Kalar said. "There is no consistency in the way the judges are handling prostitution. We (in West Sacramento) are the only jurisdiction in Yolo County that has a problem."

Nearly 100 percent of prostitutes who are arrested are convicted, Henderson said, although they don't all receive the same sentence.

The maximum penalty for a person convicted of soliciting or agreeing to an act of prostitution is six months in jail and/or a \$1,000 fine, Henderson said.

Officers admit they are fighting an uphill battle, since prostitutes are mobile and readily cross back and forth across the Sacramento River.

"We are seeing an influx of new girls from other areas," Farmer said. "What we are seeing is a number of those individuals who are on county probation in Sacramento moving over here."

Detective Bob Armstrong, a vice officer for the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, said he has seen a slight decrease in the number of prostitutes frequenting the Sacramento area.

"The protesters and police actions have had a definite impact," Armstrong said, referring to residents along Auburn Boule-

'We don't want it called the strip any more. We want it to be called the business district.'

— Barry Kalar

vard who picket hotels that cater to prostitutes. "Some of them (prostitutes) have gone to West Sacramento."

Kalar likens the situation to a water balloon. When pressure is put on one end, the water flows to the other end.

Armstrong said one reason for the movement is that Sacramento municipal courts require that all persons arrested on prostitution post \$2,000 bail.

In addition, Armstrong said, the municipal courts issue a probation order prohibiting convicted prostitutes from working for escort services, hitchhiking, soliciting customers, renting hotel rooms under assumed names or frequenting designated "red light" districts.

Armstrong said he didn't know if the probation order would still be valid if the prostitute were picked up for soliciting in Yolo County.

"It's something that would have to be worked out on a reciprocal agreement," he said.

Henderson and Lt. Ron Moore of the West Sacramento Police Department are

working on a similar probation order to present to Yolo County judges for their approval.

Kalar said his department is approaching the prostitution problem from another angle. "The problem is the reason they are working isn't for a living," Kalar said. "About 99.9 percent of the folks we are dealing with use it to support a drug habit."

Whenever possible, Kalar said his officers arrest known prostitutes for being under the influence of a controlled substance.

Last week, the Yolo Narcotics Enforcement Team assisted police by checking all arrestees for drugs.

Currently, Kalar is working on what he called "Phase III" of his prostitution project — red-light abatement.

If hotel owners are encouraging or participating in illegal activities, such as prostitution, Kalar said officers can arrest them.

Eventually, Kalar predicts, the prostitution problem will subside as redevelopment changes the face of West Capitol Avenue and some of the seedier operations are replaced by respectable businesses.

"We don't want it called the strip any more," Kalar said. "We want it to be called the business district."

Despite the increased pressure that his department is putting on the prostitutes, Kalar said there is no short-term solution to the problem.

"It's a very complex problem," Kalar said. "It isn't a problem that is going to go away overnight."

Catching 'johns' requires acting job by police decoys

By Vicky Boyd
Neighbors staff writer

West Sacramento police officer Florence Luna isn't thrilled about posing as a prostitute trying to solicit "johns," or male customers, along West Capitol Avenue. "I feel so dirty," said Luna, a petite blond who recently joined the department as a uniformed officer.

She also doesn't like the guilty feeling she gets when she has to arrest the men who have made her an offer.

"It's just a game, but (the johns) make you feel so bad when you arrest them. They say it's their first time."

But Luna nevertheless put on a convincing act last week, as West Sacramento vice officers arrested 12 men for agreeing to an act of prostitution during a four-hour sting operation.

While last week's night roundup netted a dozen soliciting customers, Sgt. Dave Farmer said that midday operations appear to be more successful.

Officers working a sting earlier in the week along West Capitol Avenue grabbed four johns on prostitution charges in less than 1½ hours.

"I think the noontime rush is so good because it's the best time that married guys can get away," Farmer said.

Last week's operation also targeted street walkers.

Two male undercover officers simultaneously worked "the strip," as West Capitol Avenue is known, picking up prostitutes who tried to solicit them.

Detective Lee Patterson, a Rio Vista police officer whom West Sacramento police use because he is a fresh face in the East Yolo Area, nabbed seven of the nine prostitutes during the four-hour period.

Driving his own personal pickup truck, Patterson cruised the strip, looking for what he thought was a prostitute walking down the street.

He would then pull slightly in front of her to get her attention and ask her if she would perform a sexual act for a specific amount of money.

When she agreed and hopped in his truck, an officer following Patterson would pull him over and arrest the woman.

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Although the johns used several different lines when soliciting Luna, the general approaches were similar.

Luna paced back and forth in front of a bus bench near the corner of Jefferson Boulevard and West Capitol Avenue, nervously chomping on a wad of gum.

On one occasion she watched a jet black

Pontiac Trans Am cruise by her three times. She flashed a smile, maintaining eye contact with the driver.

The driver, a heavyset man in his 20s with short, auburn hair, stopped and called her over.

The two began talking about having a good time and the conversation quickly turned to business and prices.

"I am a working girl, to be honest," said Luna, dressed innocuously in blue jeans, an aqua blouse and tennis shoes. "How much will you pay me if I make you happy?"

West Sacramento police detective Jiggs Falcon was picking up every word of the conversation from Luna's inconspicuous microphone.

If anything should go wrong, Falcon and fellow detective John Laugenour, who was watching the entire encounter from a nearby vantage point, could be at Luna's side within seconds.

The Trans Am driver quickly mentioned \$15 for an oral sex act.

After some additional haggling, the driver finally agreed to a price, and Luna told him to meet her at her motel room next door.

Once the Trans Am pulled into the hotel parking lot, Laugenour pulled up behind him, jumped out and ordered the driver out

of the car.

After being taken to a hotel room that the police department was using as a base station, two officers photographed the suspect, filled out an arrest report and gave him a notice to appear in court before releasing him.

"Let me put it this way, this is entrapment," the Trans Am driver said, protesting while handcuffed in the hotel room. "I am a third-year law student."

Police have been given a wider latitude when arresting prostitutes and johns, since the Legislature changed prostitution laws nearly two years ago, said Sgt. Ray Hensley of the West Sacramento Police Department.

Prior to the law change, the decoy had to let the potential customer mention the sex act and price, Hensley said.

Under the new regulations, the decoy can mention the sex act and price, but the customer must make an overt action to warrant an arrest, Hensley said.

In this case, the overt action was the Trans Am driver pulling into the motel parking lot.

The same regulations also apply to officers posing as johns trying to solicit prostitutes, Hensley said.

Recall

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to join the drive to recall the four because she feels they have never explained any of their actions to the community.

"If had given more reasons for what they are doing, it would have been more understandable," Morley said.

Pat Flint, whose children attend the Washington School District, said her group decided to seek a recall of Brooks, Carter and Siden because they acted unprofessionally when they walked out of the school.

board meeting in which Viecelli was fired in May.

"Most of the parents want changes and the four are willing to take a risk and make those changes and the three aren't," Flint said.

In addition, Flint said her group opposes recalls because they are costly.

But if one group is going to seek a recall of four members, Flint said her group would seek a recall of the other three.

Both groups have served opponents with letters of intent to circulate recall petitions, the first step in initiating a recall drive, said

Yolo County elections clerk Donna Blankenship.

Before both groups are legally able to circulate their petitions, they must allow the people targeted for recall to write a 200-word response.

Blankenship said she has received written responses from Meier, Eklund, Koerwitz and Snider.

The responses are then incorporated into the petition and sent to county counsel Charles Mack for approval.

If Mack approves the petitions, they are

returned to Blankenship and then to the people leading the recall drive.

The groups will have 120 days to gather 2,600 signatures.

Despite the confusion that two petitions might have, Stockdale said he is confident his group can collect 3,000 signatures to ensure it has the necessary 2,600.

"I would fully expect that both petitions will receive the adequate number of signatures and the community will vote on what type of school board they want," Stockdale said.