**15 arrested in first-ever CFD sex trafficking sting**

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CHEYENNE – Prostitution may have been a fixture of the Old West, but it’s the one fixture local police don’t want to see re-enacted at Cheyenne Frontier Days.

And so, in the first-ever operation of its kind, the Cheyenne Police Department joined forces this week with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to crack down on suspected sex trafficking and prostitution, arresting 15 people between Monday and Wednesday.

The news came via a Thursday afternoon release naming 14 of the 15 individuals arrested:

* Angela Martinez, 19, of Carlsbad, New Mexico; Princess Stevenson, 22, of Vancouver, Washington; and Erin Miller, 29, of Cheyenne were arrested on one count each of prostitution.
* Tasha Grip, 34, of Greeley, Colorado, was arrested for one count of prostitution and possession of methamphetamine.
* James Cox, 59; William Scott, 26; Kevin Tanner, 48; William Eigenman, 30; and James Zlomke, 47, all from Cheyenne, were arrested for one count each of soliciting an act of prostitution.

Zlomke is a teacher at Cheyenne’s East High School, where he has worked since 1999.

* Justin Johnson, 39, and Ricky McCrary, 46, both of Cheyenne, were arrested for two counts of soliciting an act of prostitution.
* Julio Reyes, 37, of Cheyenne, was arrested for two counts of soliciting an act of prostitution and possession of marijuana.
* Jose Pulido, 49, of Greeley, Colorado, was contacted during the course of the operation and arrested for possession of marijuana. Christine Yunker, 47, of Greeley, was contacted during the course of the operation and charged with possession of methamphetamine.

A 15th person, an unidentified adult male, was also arrested for soliciting a sexual act with a juvenile. His name is being withheld pending follow-up by the Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation’s Internet Crimes Against Children unit.

Cheyenne Police Chief Brian Kozak said the arrests follow more than a year of preparation, which was prompted by a contact from the FBI.

“Since we formed our Community Action Team about three years ago, there are officers that focus on problem areas we have in town,” Kozak said. “This team had, over the last couple of years, been getting information that a lot of the drug arrests we’ve been making here, meth cases, a lot of times there’s prostitution involved,” Kozak said.

“We had the FBI contact us, and one of their missions is to rescue underage girls in the sex trade, and they notice a spike in escort services here during Frontier Days. In fact, it’s one of the largest spikes they see in this region.”

With the FBI in both Cheyenne and Denver providing expertise in how to conduct a prostitution sting, Kozak said CPD officers then began soliciting prostitutes via escort services and various online sites, as well as soliciting clientele by producing their own escort pages.

“Our undercover agents pretended to be johns in hotel rooms, and the escorts would meet them in the hotel rooms,” Kozak said. “Then we would reverse that and have advertisements on websites that we had escort girls, and the johns would contact us for that as well.”

In the case of the man arrested for soliciting a sexual act with a juvenile, Kozak said the man had responded to officers who posed as a minor online.

“Our undercover agents posed as a 12-year-old, and this john came to meet her,” Kozak said.

He added that the success of the operation serves to prove what the CPD has long suspected – that Cheyenne Frontier Days, like many other large events, attracts its fair share of prostitution and, potentially, sex trafficking.

“Our investigators have been monitoring these (escort) websites, and we see spikes of activity during these times,” Kozak said. “And we have not done an operation like this in the past, so you know darn well the pimps down in the Denver area know it’s a good resource in Cheyenne because there’s no enforcement here. We wanted to change that and let them know there is enforcement now.”

Along with the FBI, Kozak said local police were assisted by the Wyoming Division of Criminal Investigation, as well as the Laramie County District Attorney’s Office, in executing the sting. He noted that the FBI’s expertise also served as training for CPD officers, making it easier for them to conduct similar operations on their own in the future.

“They were a great help with our team for their first operation,” Kozak said. “And this is something we are going to continue.”

He said the only downside, at least from a law enforcement standpoint, is that the operation failed to uncover any cases of overt sex trafficking – but not for lack of trying.

“We did not rescue any girls,” Kozak said. “One of the things our investigators do, we talk to each of the women and determine what their situation is – do they have a pimp or not, what can we help them with? In this operation, all the girls who were prostitutes were willing operators.”

Even so, the arrests do highlight the importance of pursuing human trafficking, which is something the local Zonta Club has been taking pains to publicize at this year’s rodeo as well.

“Our mission is advancing women’s status worldwide, and our intent is to raise awareness for human trafficking this Frontier Days,” said Misti Fisher with the Zonta Club of Cheyenne. “Our hope is if one person got helped, we’ve done our job.”

Fisher said she and other club members have been posting fliers all over town this week to encourage people to call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center at 888-373-7888 if they or anyone they know may be a victim of human trafficking.

“It’s hard to get people to talk about, so I’m so glad our community is starting to open its eyes to such a dark subject,” Fisher said.

“Cheyenne Frontier Days was very accommodating to us, and I think it’s great that (local law enforcement) are doing this.”

As for whether CPD has any plans to continue its undercover work through the remainder of this year’s event, Kozak said he isn’t one to kiss and tell.

“We’ve got to let people guess,” he said.