

# LOCAL NEWS

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6A

## Sex clients may get 'Dear John'

Post staff report

Police are enlisting what they hope will be a potent ally in their fight against prostitution — the partners and families of the prostitutes' customers.

The thinking goes something like this: Let's give the customers something they're going to have to explain when they get home, and then let the spouse take it from there.

In Cincinnati, it can mean coming up with a good story about what happened to the family car — which has been im-

pounded by police. In Covington, it's taking the form of a "Dear John" letter — which police hope will be seen by the families.

The "Dear John" greeting — playing off the slang term for a prostitute's customer — would be addressed to the johns themselves, said Mayor Butch Callery.

"But I figure a lot of times wives and girlfriends might open that to see what's inside," especially if they have heard about the Dear John letters, Callery said.

"The message of the letter would be that Covington does not condone that

kind of behavior," said Callery, who has asked City Attorney Jay Fossett to evaluate the concept before it is implemented.

Callery said the city would send the letters only after a conviction. To make it easier for family members to get more information, the letters might include the court case number and a phone number for the Covington police, he said.

Police Lt. Col. Mike Kraft said by threatening to expose the men to their families, the program could reduce demand in Covington for prostitutes.

Most men charged with soliciting in Covington come from elsewhere, city officials frequently note. Recent arrests have included men from Fort Thomas, Villa Hills, Newport and Cincinnati, Kraft said.

They often make bail on the misdemeanor charge and return home within hours without raising suspicion, Kraft said. Their names rarely appear in newspapers or television reports, he noted, so those at home often do not find out.

See **LETTERS** on 7A

# Letters: Cities target sex clients

## From 6A

Cincinnati last month began impounding cars used in the offenses.

"I'd hate to be the husband who has to tell his wife why the car is impounded," Lt. John Galespie of the Cincinnati Police Department's vice unit noted.

Cincinnati officials approved the vehicle seizures on the grounds that prostitution offenses often are committed in the cars or trucks.

Callery said the Covington effort is partly in reaction to what Cincinnati has done.

He doesn't want those johns visiting his city instead.

"We don't want 'em, Cincinnati doesn't want them, I don't

think Newport wants them," he said. "Nobody wants them."

Attempts to embarrass sometimes can backfire. Three top St. Paul vice officers were reassigned in 1997 when they posted a mug shot of a man who was arrested during a prostitution crackdown, but was charged with a lesser crime of loitering.

In other communities, neighborhood groups post photos of vehicles picking up suspected prostitutes — with the date and time.

Others show vehicle types and license plate numbers, along with the high-crime intersections where they were spotted after midnight.

While some consider prostitution a "victimless crime," it

spreads disease and drives people away from businesses and neighborhoods where streetwalkers linger, making people uncomfortable, Kraft said.

The "Dear John" proposal at first glance took Jeff Vessels, executive director at the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky, by surprise.

"So they're hoping the john's boyfriend or girlfriend will open the mail?" he asked, weighing the disclosure by the city against the fact that a conviction is a matter of public record, if the spouses only would know to look for it.

"I'm going to have to think on this a little bit because I'm not sure this is something we would have a position on," Vessels said.