

Aurora cops arrest 13 men in latest prostitution sting

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Despite highly publicized reverse prostitution stings and sessions where admitted customers of prostitutes must confront aggravated area residents, the latest roundup by the Aurora Police Department netted 13 men allegedly trying to buy sexual favors.

Police said each man was charged with solicitation of a prostitute for offering money for sex to an undercover female police officer. All posted bail and were released pending court appearances scheduled for Oct. 8.

The arrests occurred between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Friday near the intersections of 4th and Benton Streets, LaSalle Street and North Avenue and LaSalle and Clark Streets. Those areas are near homes of residents who have been urging the city to do more to stop prostitution in their southeast side neighborhoods.

"If they do [reverse stings] once a month, the word will get out there," said resident Paul Del Debbio. "Just like the word got out that the prostitutes were there, the word will get out that [police] are making arrests."

Friday's 13 arrests were one more than the number arrested in the last such operation, in mid-July.

Police Cmdr. Michael Fuller said the reverse stings will continue, but "they can't be the only thing that is done."

"I'm not going to kid myself that this is the master cure-all answer and there won't be any more prostitution," he said. "We're dealing with the symptom in many cases. Who is dealing with the cause?"

He said most prostitutes work to pay for a drug habit, and to quit they need help to stop using drugs. "It's beyond just a police department program," he said.

Many residents in Del Debbio's neighborhood are working on a prostitution task force established by Ald. David Marquez, who represents the area.

The task force is scheduled to issue recommendations Tuesday at a meeting of the City Council's Government Operations Committee. The recommendations may include increased fines for prostitution and solicitation, videotaping prostitution activity, and cracking down on landlords whose property is the site of prostitution activity.

Some residents also have taken part in a "restorative justice" program established by Assistant Kane County State's Atty. Richard Irvin. In that program, men who were arrested and admitted trying to solicit sex were told by residents how prostitution has degraded their neighborhood. The men also did two days of community service.

Nineteen men participated in the first session, which also included blood testing for sexually transmitted diseases. They were among 31 men arrested in two reverse prostitution stings conducted on the near east and southeast sides in June and July.

Law-enforcement officials said more men could be given the option of taking part in similar programs, but it's unclear whether those arrested Friday will be among them.

Police and prosecutors believe it's important to have two groups of men--those who go through traditional justice channels and those in the restorative justice program--to compare recidivism rates.