"John" Letters Target Prostitution

By: Jeanne Houck

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Covington Mayor Irvin "Butch" Callery has been sending out a very different kind of "Dear John" letter for about a year, and he's hopeful it's putting a dent in the prostitution trade in the city. The letters, part of Covington's effort to reshape its once tawdry reputation as a haven for strip clubs and street walkers, are sent by registered mail to the homes of men convicted of soliciting prostitution, saying they are not welcome to practice their vice in the city.

Although the mayor signs the letters with his nickname "Butch," the missives themselves are anything but friendly.

Noting that he's examined Kenton District Court records that show the prostitution conviction, Callery warns:

"We will monitor whether you and other persons convicted of soliciting prostitution are repeat offenders in the city of Covington.

"If you are convicted as a repeat offender of this crime in our city, we will request that the court impose enhanced penalties in sentencing you, including jail time, and we will make a copy of this letter available to (the court) at the time of trial for (the judge) to consider as part of its sentencing."

Covington police reported nine arrests on prostitution and vice charges in 2003, compared to 98 in 2002. This year, stings and crackdowns will push the number of arrests past the 2002 numbers.

Although the number of arrests so far this calendar year have not yet been computed, police said some 145 men and women already have been arrested on prostitution-related charges in 2004. Some might have been arrested multiple times, pushing the number of total arrests higher.

Callery and the police say it would be dangerous to conclude that an increase in prostitution arrests means the problem is worsening or that a drop in arrests necessarily means the problem is easing up.

Prostitution will likely always be a concern for Covington, they said, and statistics may be more tied to the number of stings and crackdowns mounted by the police than anything else -- including the "Dear John" letters.

The number of letters Callery mails out -- some 30 so far -- will lag behind the number of arrests because the mayor only sends them when someone is convicted of soliciting prostitution, a misdemeanor carrying a maximum sentence of 90 days in the county jail and a $250 fine.

Although responses to Callery's letters have been nearly non-existent, a phone call taken by city commission secretary Maggie Nyhan illustrates that the "Dear John" initiative is having some effect.

"We got one phone call from either the wife or the mother of someone arrested, and she said she got this letter from the city and wanted to know if it was for senior or junior," Callery said.

"Maggie gave her the date of birth and she said 'Ohhhhh.'

"No one wants their wife or girlfriend or mother to get one of those."

Kenton County Attorney Garry Edmondson, whose office prosecutes misdemeanors, said he thought the letters had had some effect.

"I can confirm that those people who have gotten a letter won't do it again," Edmondson said.

"Anything that discourages the 'johns' from coming to our community is good."

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