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Detectives arrest two massage parlor managers; [Metro Edition]

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Abstract (Summary)

The police say the businesses, Central Health and the Midori Spa, are really houses of prostitution. There are close to a dozen such businesses in the city, according to Lt. Thomas A. Verdi. Because indoor prostitution is legal in Rhode Island, the most the police can do is bust the businesses for giving massages without a license.

The two women arrested yesterday were Young He Helgran, 49, the manager of Central Health, at 76 Derry St.; and Hyon Suk Bivians, 42, the manager of Midori Spa, at 112 Union St.

At Midori Spa, detectives found a woman lying on a couch with her feet wrapped in bandages, suffering from a serious infection, Verdi said. The woman, Mi Ja Santoro, 44, was taken to Rhode Island Hospital. A hospital spokesman said last night that she was not listed as a patient.

Full Text (553 words)

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PROVIDENCE - The detective arrived, complaining of pain in his low-er back and asking for a massage. He got one -- but he also got an offer of sex for \$200, the police said.

Detectives arrested two women yesterday at separate businesses -- one off Douglas Avenue, the other downtown -- for permitting massages to be given without a license.

The police say the businesses, Central Health and the Midori Spa, are really houses of prostitution. There are close to a dozen such businesses in the city, according to Lt. Thomas A. Verdi. Because indoor prostitution is legal in Rhode Island, the most the police can do is bust the businesses for giving massages without a license.

"We're going to do it weekly until these houses of prostitution either close their doors, or we close them legally," Verdi, who heads the Narcotics & Organized Crime Division, said last night.

The state Department of Health regulates massage parlors, restaurants and beaches -- 8,000 facilities -- with a staff of 12 inspectors, according to Ernest M. Julian, chief of the food protection office.

In July, the General Assembly passed a law requiring people seeking massage licenses to undergo criminal background checks and fingerprinting, and prohibiting convicted sex offenders from obtaining licenses. Legislators said the law would make it easier to crack down on brothels calling themselves massage parlors, but they stopped short of passing a bill that would have criminalized indoor prostitution.

Verdi says he'll push for reintroduction of the measure when the new legislative session begins in January.

Until then, Verdi said, his division is working with the city solicitor's office to encourage -- and, if necessary, to force

-- landlords to break leases of businesses that employ unlicensed massage therapists.

The two women arrested yesterday were Young He Helgran, 49, the manager of Central Health, at 76 Derry St.; and Hyon Suk Bivians, 42, the manager of Midori Spa, at 112 Union St.

Bivians was charged with the same offense, a misdemeanor, in May. This time, the police also charged her with maintaining a common nuisance.

Helgran lives at 54 Clyde St., Pawtucket, according to the arrest report. Bivians' arrest report gives her address as 112 Union St., the same as the spa.

At Central Health, where the detective said he had been offered sex for \$200, the report said he seized a "confidential health history form" with a diagram of the body that directed, "Circle any areas of tension."

At Midori Spa, the detective paid \$60 and received a massage, the report said. It said the worker then asked, "You want this?" and simulated masturbation, adding that it would cost another \$60.

The police visited both businesses about noon yesterday. The workers who allegedly made the offers of sex were not charged.

Verdi said the two managers were being held at police headquarters, where they were to have appeared last night before a bail commissioner.

At Midori Spa, detectives found a woman lying on a couch with her feet wrapped in bandages, suffering from a serious infection, Verdi said. The woman, Mi Ja Santoro, 44, was taken to Rhode Island Hospital. A hospital spokesman said last night that she was not listed as a patient.

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