

N.O. city official denies he knew of vice, bribes

NEW ORLEANS (UPI) — A high-ranking appointed city official denies knowing about prostitution and police payoffs police say occurred in a building he owns on the French Quarter's "seamen's strip."

Louis Gomez, the city council's fiscal officer, acknowledged he owned the building containing Los Amantes Bar, one of several establishments raided by city police and federal agents in a major sweep against prostitution, gambling and narcotics. The operation resulted in 114 arrests. Gomez was not arrested.

He said Friday he was unaware of illegal activity that may have occurred in his building. The bar is the property of Paulinos Lopez, one of nine persons accused of federal racketeering on charges he paid bribes to police who pretended to ignore vice activity.

Most of those arrested were prostitutes, but city and federal officials said the real targets were the leaders of the vice activity. Many of the prostitutes will be subpoenaed to testify before a federal grand jury that will consider racketeering charges against nine persons accused of bribing policemen.

Authorities said the police cataloged the bribes and dozens of other criminal offenses during an 8-month undercover investigation designed to uncover the kingpins of French Quarter vice.

The raids took place Thursday night along a 2-block strip of dark bars and dingy hotels where the operators charged \$5 a room for prostitutes to bring their clients.

The owner of another bar included in the raids was identified as the brother of a deputy in the Orleans Parish criminal sheriff's office. Orestes Pena, owner of the Habana Bar, is a brother of deputy Andreas Pena, the *Times-Picayune* reported.

Although neither was arrested, Gomez and Andreas Pena may be subpoenaed to testify before a federal grand jury investigating vice and racketeering in the Decatur Street area of the French Quarter, the newspaper reported Saturday.

"We have no plans to prosecute Mr. Gomez," said U.S. Atty. John Volz.

However, he refused comment about a Honduran trip made by Gomez, Andreas Pena and two undercover policemen who worked on the case.

The two policemen made the trip as bodyguards for Reynard Rochon, the chief administrative officer to Mayor Ernest Morial and the city's representative at a Honduran carnival, but Rochon was not expected to receive a grand jury subpoena, the newspaper reported.

The city council said it will investigate the Gomez matter and issue a report.

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