



# Memphis Press-Scimitar

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Page 6

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Give Light and the People Will Find Their Own Way

## Super-Secret Sleuths

Something strange is going on in the law enforcement world. Something the average citizen might find hard to understand.

A super-secret, privately formed but publicly funded agency is helping local police departments keep tabs on criminals who hop around from state to state as they conduct their illegal operations.

That sort of thing used to be the Federal Bureau of Investigation's job.

The Regional Organized Crime Information Center headquartered in Memphis is so secretive that U.S. Attorney Mike Cody had never even heard of it. Yet the group's annual \$2.3 million in federal money comes from the same Justice Department Cody serves as top local official.

Memphis police once channeled the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (a Justice Department agency) funding to the ROCIC, but stopped — perhaps wisely — because it had no control over how the money was spent.

"ROCIC was spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on super-sensitive electronic equipment, hundreds of thousands on travel and informers and we couldn't get an accounting of how and for what it was being spent," said Police Director E.W. Chapman.

A refusal to take bids for equipment also was a problem, added city Chief Administrative Officer Henry Evans. "We just cannot be responsible for grants in which we have no control over how the money is spent," Evans said.

LEAA now sends the ROCIC money through the State of North Carolina, which, like the Memphis Police Department, subscribes to the information network's services.

Rex Armistead, former criminal intelligence officer for the Mississippi Highway Patrol, who heads ROCIC, says it is a clearing house for information on "traveling criminals," serving member law enforcement agencies in 15 states. He and his assistant, former Memphis Police Chief Bill Price, in answer to American Civil Liberties Union concern that ROCIC might be spying on private citizens as well as criminals, insist that the organization conducts no domestic intelligence.

Armistead and Price say the FBI doesn't concentrate on such "street crimes" as bank robbery and interstate auto theft anymore, and local police departments can't afford the extensive detective work these crimes require. Member departments pay \$1,000 to join ROCIC, which keeps files on felons convicted in three or more jurisdictions.

"It was recognized that big-city and small-city law enforcement agencies needed to pool their resources and their knowledge to keep up with the mobile modern criminal," said Jim Golden, director of criminal conspiracies for LEAA. "The traveling criminal of today can get on a plane in Tulsa in the morning, go to Atlanta and pull a job, and get on another plane and be back in Tulsa that night. Thus, this regional pooling of knowledge was devised."

It still sounds like a job for the FBI