



BY TIM BULLARD

You can hear the talk about Buddy's Truck Stop on the CB radio near Interstate 95 where motorists, truckers and pilgrims stop by for a quickie. Buddy's always has a certain smell—a damp, musky smell mixed with bleach and pine-scented cleaner. It's known up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

Last year a Lee Correctional inmate filed four frivolous federal civil conspiracy lawsuits against several defendants, claiming law enforcement authorities railroaded him because he allegedly helped a prostitute at Buddy's escape the bordello.

The defendants in his lawsuit included Sheriff Charles "Chuck" Foley, SLED Chief Robert Stewart, the Marlboro County Board of Commissioners and almost everybody under the sun, including E.B. "Buddy" Tiller and Joel Tiller of Hartsville.

Their lawyer "vehemently" denied the allegations of inmate Ronald F. Jackson, who Foley had helped jail years ago. The suit, accusing Foley of being a "silent partner and conspirator" in the bordello's operation, was for \$284 million.

The suit alleged the bordello remains "open 24 hours a day, six days a week," and other wild claims, including that murders have taken place at there.

Jackson's former warden, Bill Davis at Evans Correctional Institution, called Jackson a jailhouse lawyer. "He's one of the worst," Davis said.

Foley said Jackson "will say any damned thing in the world. I've known him for 30 years. He's been a crook for 30 years. Man, he hates me because I don't play with him. You name it, he's done it. He's been a thug all his damned life."

In an interview from prison, Jackson said, "I wish [Foley] well. I want him to stay well until we get into federal court. You've got the Southern Dixie Mafia. SLED is in on it too. Foley has got some power."

A recent Freedom of Information request to SLED revealed the agency has no files on the operation, according to a recent reply from an agent.

Although law enforcement authorities readily admit there is little question that the Trucker's Motel is a brothel, it continues to operate openly after more than three decades. How this can be so—especially in the Bible Belt—authorities

will tell you is because of a lack of funds. "Priorities," say Foley, SLED spokesman Hugh Munn and FBI agent Joe Younginer in Florence.

Foley said it costs a lot of taxpayers' money to produce a sting. "You've got priorities to go by," he said. "You have to use priorities." A sting would require four or five SLED agents and a few deputies, he said. "When you multiply their hours out, you can see how much you've spent. It's a terrific cost," the sheriff said, adding it's a difficult case to prove in court.

"It's hard to come up with all that stuff," he explained. "The bonds are light."

Munn said he cannot say the Trucker's Motel is a bordello because of the possibility of a libel lawsuit. "Be careful," he warned. "That's a violent county. Anything you write you had better be able to back up. I can't say some things I know to be true. We work where we are requested to assist. It's just like anything else. You have so much going on. You just get to what you can get to. We can't be everywhere."

Foley said there have been some raids, stressing that the operation began long before he came into office in 1985. Just down the road toward Bennettsville, Candy's Truck Stop operated as a bordello for years until it was destroyed more than a decade ago. "Somebody burned it down," Foley said.

Just across the Darlington County line near Dovesville there is Shady Pines, a truck stop that the Darlington Fire Chief recently described as "the only truck stop without gas pumps." A Shady Pines employee called the place "an old folks home" because of the age of the hookers. He asked me what my shoe size was, too, and told me not to do a story.

"They all give false names," Foley said. "They've got aliases like everybody in that world."

The sheriff said, "You've got the legitimate side of the business too. We've never had any problems out there. There have been very few. This one never has given us any prob-

lems." Foley added that since interstate violations are evident, the FBI should be involved. "I think the feds just about quit," said Foley. "How can they stay open in Florence? How can they stay open in Darlington County?"

Actually, there have been problems at Buddy's Truck Stop before, and the FBI was involved, according to FBI agent Younginer.

On July 9, 1989, Younginer arrested Kelly Lenah Floyd, 28, of Hartsville, charging her with interstate flight to avoid prosecution. The woman was accused of running a teenage prostitution ring at a brothel where girls as young as 14 worked. She had reportedly fled San Francisco shortly before a March 1988 police raid after a probe that began in May 1987.

"Tip leads to arrest of fugitive in area after show aired," read the headline in a regional newspaper.

Floyd, a.k.a. "Sunshine," was wanted for pimping, pandering and escape. Moments after a broadcast on the Fox TV show "America's Most Wanted," 135 calls were fielded in Washington, D.C., after the 10-minute segment, according to Younginer, so he was called in.

"We got several calls from Washington," Younginer said. "I went up to Bennettsville on a Sunday night. I didn't identify myself as an FBI agent."

The only thing that he and another agent had to go on was that this suspect was short, blonde and sported a tattoo of a teddy bear. When the two men entered the bar, there were several women who fit the general description, so there was a lineup and a search for the secret clue. When that turned up nothing, Younginer said he asked the owner, Buddy Tiller, where the woman was. "He said, 'She's in a trailer. She's not working tonight.'"

It was 2 a.m. "When we got there, she had a housecoat on. She didn't like me," Younginer said. In the trailer was also a shotgun. Loaded.

The suspect told the FBI she worked as a "waitress" at the truck stop. Her bond was finally set at \$25,000.

Why doesn't the FBI pursue the closing of the truck stop like Foley suggested?

"The feds don't get into that. The FBI does not investigate that," Younginer said. "It's left up to the counties and to the state. The state and county knows about what is going on out there. I don't know if they pay them off or not. I don't have any evidence that they are being paid off."

If there were any such evidence, however, Younginer said the agency would become involved.

The agent suggested I talk to C. Gordon McBride, the 4th Circuit solicitor.

"I am more than willing to cooperate with law enforcement," McBride said. "I support them 100 percent. No one has ever indicated any problems. People have alleged that there are improprieties going on at the Trucker's Motel, but I sort of go along with Sheriff Foley in that none of the raids have turned up anything. I don't make cases. I present them to the Sheriff's Department."

Same question, different official: "How can prostitution operate so openly for 30 years in Marlboro County?"

"That I don't know," he said. "There are some unconcerned people, and they think they are safe."

Tim Bullard is a reporter with The Florence Morning News.

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