

## WATCHDOG: A CLOSER LOOK

## Cramer case exemplifies changing view of sex trafficking



Tom Cramer could die in prison.

That's not a particularly settling thought if you're Tom Cramer.

Cramer, you may recall, ran an escort service and pleaded guilty in March to the sex trafficking of underage women. I first wrote about him after his arrest in February 2012, the first significant sex trafficking bust in a series that have continued locally since.

Since then, Cramer and I have spoken a number of times. He's called me from jails and prison, wherever he may be incarcerated at the time, and encouraged me to dig into some of the allegations against him.

His roommate in a Brighton home was also trafficking women, Cramer alleged, a claim that seems to be borne out by the court documents. That individual is

a convicted sex offender. Why, Cramer asked, was he not criminally charged?

Also, Cramer said, he wasn't a brutal pimp, the kind portrayed in movies (and the kind who does exist for many fragile women on the street). One woman came to him for help after she'd been beaten by her pimp. He got her out of danger, then she joined the escort service operations he ran, Cramer said.

None of this changes the criminal charges against Cramer. And Tom Cramer is a prime example of a changing criminal justice landscape.

Before his 2012 arrest, Cramer was jailed for crimes ranging from bad checks to swindles. Before that incarceration, the crimes he is now accused of committing may have been resolved with lesser charges of promoting prostitution.

But now both state and federal police agencies have strengthened their sex trafficking enforcement. Whereas the prostitutes typically were the

ones arrested and jailed in the past, the police now recognize — or at least some do — that there often is a coercive element with the crime. Busting the hookers is easy; finding the trafficker takes more work.

Sex traffickers may provide drugs for addicts or a roof over the head for runaways as a way to get young women and men to turn to prostitution. Yes, there are some prostitutes who operate on their own, pocketing all of their money, but more often than not there is a man or woman peeling away a large percentage of the money taken in by the prostitutes.

The Monroe County Sheriff's Office and Rochester police are active members of an anti-trafficking task force in western New York. They've been aggressive with their trafficking investigations, said Andra Ackerman, the deputy chief of the Monroe County District Attorney's Special Victims Trial Division.

With prostitution cases "you definitely see



Thomas Cramer of Brighton, seen here in 2012 is scheduled to be sentenced next Thursday.  
TINA YEE STAFF FILE PHOTO 2012

law enforcement taking another look and looking deeper," she said.

Tom Cramer ran an escort service. A decade ago he may not have been considered a sex trafficker. Now he is.

And, what's as sad as his dismal future in prison — a morbidly obese man who weighs 450 pounds, Cramer suffers from multiple health ailments — is the fact that he's a pretty smart guy. He's adept with computers, articulate and bright.

While imprisoned at a state prison in 2006, his

cell was searched after a guard thought books Cramer was reading had questionable titles. Those books: *Hacking Windows XP*, *Hacking Exposed*, *Red Hat Linux Bible* and *Windows XP Bible*.

Records show that Cramer may have been a victim of physical abuse when young.

"Cramer was born prematurely on April 13, 1972, to a mother who suffered from spina bifi-da and was confined to a wheelchair and to a father who suffered from Paranoid Schizophrenia," Cramer's attorney, Assistant Federal Public Defender Jeffrey Ciccone writes in court papers.

Cramer's father once threw boiling water on him when Cramer was 6 or 7 years old, Ciccone says in court papers. His mother once punctured his arm with a screwdriver because he had not cleaned his room.

That upbringing, his health problems, and his remorse, Cramer hopes, may make a judge think twice before locking him up for life.

Cramer is scheduled

to be sentenced next Thursday. The mandatory minimum sentence for his crimes is 10 years, and the maximum is life.

In a letter to U.S. District Judge Frank Geraci Jr., Cramer seems to recognize what the law now does: that he was not an innocent bystander in the prostitution business. Instead, he relied on runaways and vulnerable young women.

"My justification to myself was that the women knew what the business was about and there wasn't any force," he wrote. "Today I understand the completely wrongness in that when people won't look out for themselves I needed to look out for them and THAT was my failure.

"I knew better but put my conscience on the back burner looking at the fun & money."

*The watchdog column appears in print on Fridays and online all the time in the watchdog blog at DemocratandChronicle.com. Gary Craig can be reached at (585) 258-2479.*