

Updates a story posted Thursday at 12:06 p.m.

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(http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/08/criminal_charges_filed_against_lee_police_chief)

SPRINGFIELD — Following a nearly year-long joint FBI (<http://topics.masslive.com/tag/fbi/index.html>) and Massachusetts State Police (<http://topics.masslive.com/tag/massachusetts-state-police/index.html>) investigation, Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen Breslow filed four criminal charges against Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis at federal district court in Springfield Thursday alleging he extorted \$4,000 from two people facing prostitution-related charges.

Buffis' attorney says he is innocent.

Buffis was charged with three counts of money laundering and one count of extortion by use of fear based on his office. A court date has not been set.

A statement from the U.S. Attorney's Office said: "It is alleged that in February 2012 Buffis, 55, of Pittsfield, acting in his official capacity as Lee Police Chief, extorted a \$4,000 'donation' from two individuals who were facing prostitution-related charges.

"The 'donation' was made payable to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund, a holiday toy fund that Buffis controlled. Buffis deposited the \$4,000 check into the Toy Fund's bank account and quickly withdrew \$3,990 which he then deposited into a joint bank account that he operated with his wife. The diverted money was then used to pay for various personal expenses. Buffis is alleged to have lied to law enforcement about the disposition of the funds."

Contacted Thursday, Lee Town Administrator Robert Nason said: "This is the first I have heard of it." Nason said he would need to review the court documents before commenting.

A official at the Lee Police Department said Buffis is on vacation.

The police official said the chief had not set up his voice mail to accept telephone messages. Calls placed to Buffis' cell telephone were not returned.

Buffis' attorney, Lori Levinson, said in a telephone interview, "Chief Buffis has done absolutely nothing wrong. He has enjoyed a long and unblemished career in law enforcement. We are confident that at the end of the day he will be cleared of any wrongdoing."

The criminal indictment of Buffis stems from a January 2012 sting intended to address reports of prostitution at a local inn, court documents show.

In the indictment, two people targeted in that sting are identified as Citizen 1 and Citizen 2.

"While the Lee Police Department and state police did not arrest anyone on that date, Buffis informed the Berkshire Eagle that Citizen 1 and Citizen 2 had been arrested on prostitution-related charges," court documents show. "The Berkshire Eagle reported the arrests ... which caused Citizen 1 and Citizen 2 emotional distress and resulted in lost business for the inn." The indictment does not name the individuals nor disclose which inn.

The indictment says Lee police sought criminal complaints against the two at Southern Berkshire District Court located in Great Barrington.

According to the government, Buffis drafted a secret deal with the two suspects.



(http://www.masslive.com/the-big-e/index.ssf/2013/09/new_big_e_wine_cheese_barn_winning_cheeses_wine.html)

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The Lee police chief allegedly promised the two that if they paid him \$4,000 "as a voluntary donation in lieu of criminal fines or civil forfeiture action" -- supposedly for the toy fund -- the pending complaint against them involving prostitution would go away, the indictment says.

As part of the Buffis deal with the two, according to the indictment, the police chief had them agree that "none of the parties would disclose the outcome of the proceedings" -- and the pair "would be barred from bringing a civil or criminal action against the Town of Lee or its employees."

Buffis did this at the courthouse, according to the prosecutor, just before the probable cause hearing that was to take place at Southern Berkshire District Court on February 21, 2012.

Email

U.S. vs. Joseph Buffis Indictment (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/158962050/U-S-vs-Joseph-Buffis-Indictment>) by **masslive** (<http://www.scribd.com/masslive>)

Case 3:13-cr-30028-MAP Docum

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The indictment states that at the probable cause hearing, "Buffis informed the Clerk Magistrate, in sum and substance, that a) the matter should be continued only until the end of the day, b) Citizen 1 and Citizen 2 had agreed to donate the prostitution proceeds, c) the parties had entered into a non-disclosure agreement, and d) the Lee Police Department did not intend to proceed with any charges. Accordingly, the Clerk Magistrate did not issue any criminal complaints against Citizen 1 and Citizen 2."

That action resulted in Buffis being charged with extortion. Because money went from the toy fund account to his personal bank account, he is charged with money laundering.

The indictment says Buffis "made false statements" to state police and "obstructed" the investigation -- involving "the disposition of the 'donation'" and that he and his wife spent the money at a liquor store and a hardware store.

Berkshire District Attorney David Capeless was asked why the U.S. attorney's office is prosecuting the case -- instead of his office -- and why the FBI led the investigation.

"We were concerned about maintaining a good working relationship with Lee police while prosecuting the chief; so we spoke with the FBI and asked them to lead the investigation," Capeless said.

Capeless also said that Buffis had initially asked for assistance from the state police crime unit overseen by the district attorney regarding the prostitution allegation at the inn.

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(http://masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/09/springfield_pol)
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"Then task force members heard" the prosecution by Lee police suddenly ended, Capeless said. "We became alarmed and began to look into it."

"This demonstrates no one is above the law," Capeless added. "Even if it is a fellow member of law enforcement we are going to pursue it. I was very concerned a charge as serious as prostitution was being scuttled."

Capeless said it is for selectmen to decide what to do with Buffis while the case winds its way through court.

State Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli, D-Lenox, whose district includes Lee, said: "I find it unfortunate. I have known the chief and his family a long time. It is certainly not a reflection of the good work the police in Lee does on an ongoing basis. We have to see how it plays out. It is going to run its course and whatever will be will be."

Email

Contacted Thursday afternoon, lifelong Lee resident Bill Navin, 65, said he had just heard about the matter watching it on a New York television station.

"Personally, knowing him and his family, it is very, very, very hard to believe," Navin said.

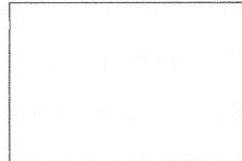
"I have had a lot of dealings with Joe. Everybody's loves him. But on another note, there is a lot of turmoil in the police department."

Navin works as a security officer at a local company, and frequently attends the Tuesday night selectmen's meetings. He often speaks to them.

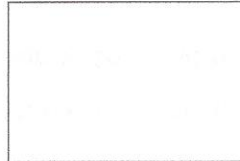
"It's devastating to the community, to everybody. A lot of people are depressed over it," Navin added. He is a town meeting member

Deidre Consolati, who is also a town meeting member, stated: "Leaders in the town of Lee seem to have forgotten their responsibilities to the townspeople. The secrecy in Lee government has now come to an end. We want accountability, big time."

The U.S. attorney's office has asked those who have donated cash or toys to the Edward J. Lalilberte Toy Fund or who have applied to the fund to contact the FBI Springfield office at (413) 732-0159. Anyone who has questions or concerns regarding this matter should call.



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Historic Massachusetts inn caught running prostitution business

Posted: Jan 20, 2012 8:13 PM PST

By Robert Boyd - [email](#)

LEE, MA - A historic inn in western Massachusetts has given a new definition to breakfast in bed after the owners were charged with running a prostitution business from within the establishment.

It all took place at The Inn at Laurel Lake, which has been a part of Lee Massachusetts history since 1881.

"It was a big shock to the community having that being run right in town under our noses," said Officer Ryan Lucy of the Lee Police Dept.

Police say 39-year-old Tara Viola is charged with soliciting sexual favors for a fee. She and her husband, 47-year-old Thomas Fusco, are both charged with keeping house of ill fame and conspiring to promote prostitution.

Police say Viola advertised massage services on the inn's web site.

"It wasn't spelled out but it was asked to email them and through email she spelled out more of what was going on," said Lucy.

Police believe they may have been dealing with prostitution for over a year and at least one more employee could be involved.

"They were keeping it separate from business, their busy season was for clients while the off season they turned more to prostitution," said Lucy.

Police say they will be summoned to Southern Berkshire District Court on Monday to answer to the charges.

Fusco refused to speak with NEWS10.

Fusco has owned the 130-year-old inn since 1996 and currently lives there with his wife.

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Indictment

Police chief in Mass. accused of forcing donations

Thursday, August 8, 2013 -- The Associated Press

Local Coverage

Thursday, August 8, 2013

Author(s):

Associated Press

BOSTON — The police chief in the small western Massachusetts town of Lee used his rank to force people facing prostitution-related charges to donate to a holiday toy fund he ran, then withdrew the money for his own use, authorities said Thursday in announcing his federal indictment.

Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis was indicted Thursday on extortion and money laundering charges after a lengthy probe that included searches of the police headquarters as well as his home in Pittsfield.

Buffis is accused of extorting a \$4,000 donation from two people who were facing prostitution-related charges. Buffis also faces three counts of money laundering, U.S. District Attorney Carmen Ortiz said in a joint statement with state police superintendent Col. Timothy Alben and Berkshire District Attorney David Capeless.

They say Buffis used his title to extort the so-called donation in February 2012 to the Edward J. Lalilberte Toy Fund, which he controlled. Authorities allege he quickly withdrew almost all the money, putting it in a personal account he controlled with his wife and using it for his own expenses.

Buffis later lied to investigators about the use of the funds, prosecutors alleged.

"The alleged actions of Chief Buffis disgrace the many incredible law enforcement stewards who uphold and enforce the law," Ortiz said.

Buffis didn't immediately respond to an email or a call seeking comment.

Berkshire District Attorney Capeless said the accusations target only Buffis, not the Lee police department or any other member of its force.

Authorities say anyone else who made so-called donations to toy fund should contact the FBI.

Source URL:

http://bostonherald.com/news_opinion/local_coverage/2013/08/police_chief_in_mass_accused_of_forcing_donations

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Prostitution alleged at The Inn at Laurel Lake

By Dick Lindsay, Berkshire Eagle Staff, (mailto:rlindsay@berkshireeagle.com?subject=Berkshire Eagle Online:)

POSTED: 02/24/2012 11:00:25 AM EST | UPDATED: ABOUT A YEAR AGO

Friday January 20, 2012

LEE -- Two innkeepers face charges they were running a prostitution business out of their historic lakeside bed and breakfast, Lee police said on Thursday.

Tara Viola will face one count of soliciting sexual favors for a fee at The Inn at Laurel Lake along Route 20. Viola, 39, and her husband, Thomas Fusco, 47, also will each face one count of keeping house of ill fame and conspiring to promote prostitution.

The couple will be summoned to the Southern Berkshire District Court at a later date to answer to the charges, according to Lee police Officer Ryan Lucy.

On Thursday night, Fusco refuted in a brief statement to The Eagle the police report that he and his wife will be charged in connection to the alleged sex crimes. Later, police confirmed that those charges are indeed pending.

Lucy said the monthlong investigation by Lee police and the Berkshire County Drug Task Force will continue and additional charges are pending against the couple.

According to police, Viola and Fusco tried discretely to advertise the prostitution service on the Internet under the guise of the wife's massage business conducted at the lakeside inn. Viola is a licensed masseuse.

Lucy said authorities were alerted to the online advertisement that had been posted for some time.

On Thursday morning, Lee police and drug task force members arrived at the inn and informed the couple of their investigation. The couple live at the inn.

Later in the day, Viola waived her right to an attorney and gave a statement to investigating Lee police officers, Lucy said. Fusco hasn't formally spoken to police.

Fusco bought The Inn at Laurel Lake in 1996, one of only five owners of the 130-year-old establishment, according to the inn's website. Built in 1881, George W. Boardman was the original innkeeper, who also served as Lee's fire chief from 1913 until his death in 1930.

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Secrecy in sex case involving owners of the Inn at Laurel Lake

By Dick Lindsay, Berkshire Eagle Staff, (mailto:rlindsay@berkshireeagle.com?)

subject=Berkshire Eagle Online:)

POSTED: 02/24/2012 01:56:53 AM EST
UPDATED: 02/24/2012 11:02:34 AM EST

Friday February 24, 2012

LEE -- Authorities are tight-lipped about the results of show-cause hearing involving two innkeepers local police claim had been running a prostitution business out of their historic bed and breakfast.

Lee police say they can't divulge the outcome of this week's show-cause hearing held in the Southern Berkshire District Court in Great Barrington involving Tara Viola and her husband, Thomas Fusco, owners of the Inn at Laurel Lake.

In mid-January, police had charged the wife with soliciting sexual favors for a fee at the inn on Route 20. Viola, 39, and Fusco, 47, were also each accused of keeping a house of ill fame and conspiring to promote prostitution.

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[Jan. 20, 2012: Prostitution alleged at The Inn at Laurel Lake](#)

(http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_19780161)

The couple was summoned to appear before clerk magistrate Thomas Bartini, who held the hearing on Tuesday -- the result of which has been sealed, according to Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis.

There is a nondisclosure agreement among the parties involved," Buffis said. "The findings of the magistrate will not be made public."

Buffis wouldn't comment if the ruling means the case is closed against the couple or if it remains open.

He did note that keeping secret the results of a show-cause hearing isn't unusual.

"This is typical of non-violent, misdemeanor cases," Buffis said. "The reason to keep them at the show-cause level is it gives normally law-abiding citizens an unblemished record."

According to police, Viola and Fusco tried discretely to advertise the prostitution service on the Internet under the guise of the wife's massage business conducted at the lakeside inn. Viola is a licensed masseuse.

Local authorities were alerted to the online advertisement that had been posted for some time.

On Jan. 19, Lee police and members of the Berkshire County Drug Task Force arrived at the inn and informed the couple of their month-long investigation. The couple lives at the inn.

Fusco bought The Inn at Laurel Lake in 1996, one of only five owners of the 130-year-old establishment, according to the inn's website. Built in 1881, George W. Boardman was the original innkeeper. He also served as Lee's fire chief from 1913 until his death in 1930.

To reach Dick Lindsay:

rlindsay@berkshireeagle.com (mailto:rlindsay@berkshireeagle.com),
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Status quo for Lee police chief tied to holiday fund that is under investigation

By Dick Lindsay, Berkshire Eagle Staff Berkshire Eagle

Posted:

BerkshireEagle.com

→ LEE -- Leading town officials said Wednesday they don't plan any immediate action against Lee Police Chief Joseph L. Buffis following confirmation that federal authorities are investigating a holiday fund managed by Buffis for more than 30 years.

As part of a criminal investigation involving the Laliberte Toy Fund in Lee, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Springfield is collecting copies of Laliberte articles published in The Eagle between October 2007 and January 2012.

The Eagle reported on its website Tuesday that it was honoring the U.S. Attorney's request to obtain the articles because they already are available online. The request marked the official confirmation of a law enforcement probe of the Laliberte Toy Fund, which provides toys to needy families in the Lee area every Christmas season.

Buffis managed the fund from 1979 until it was suspended last year pending what he called a "reorganization." Buffis joined the Lee Police Department as a patrolman in 1979 and has been police chief since September 2011.

Despite news of the Laliberte probe, Buffis remains the police chief in Lee, according to Selectmen Chairwoman Patricia Carlino.

"He hasn't been charged with anything," Carlino said Wednesday.

"We have no information about the case at this time," added Town Administrator Robert Nason. "Until we do, we have no basis to take any action."

→ Nason and the board made similar remarks after the FBI searched the Lee Police Department and reportedly Buffis' home in Pittsfield nearly four months ago. The agency has refused to say what it was looking for and what, if anything, it found when it executed search warrants on Nov. 19.

→ Federal investigators have declined to comment on their activities, including whether Buffis is the target of an investigation. Buffis has confirmed that he has retained an attorney.

Meanwhile, the remaining members of the police force -- 10 full-time members of the Lee Patrol Officers Union No. 396 -- have gone on record stating they are not subjects of an investigation.

Buffis and a union representative -- on Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively -- declined to comment about the U.S. Attorney's request to view Laliberte Toy Fund articles published by The Eagle.

The newspaper has published the Laliberte lists during the annual holiday fund drive as a community service, and The Eagle has reported occasional articles about the fund's progress.

The newspaper isn't financially or managerially involved in the fund.

Founded in 1958, the Laliberte Toy Fund continually served the Lee area until it was suspended for Christmas 2012. In an interview in December, Buffis told The Eagle the fund was undergoing a "reorganization" and would return in 2013 under new supervision.

While no donations were accepted by and no toys distributed through the toy fund last year, requests from families that would have benefited from the gift giving were forwarded to other local holiday fundraisers.

Edward J. Laliberte, a longtime Lee police officer, established the toy fund 55 years ago. It was named for him after his death in the 1980s.

The fund annually has provided toys for more than 120 children ages 9 and under in Lee, Tyringham and Lenox Dale. In recent years, the fund has raised more than \$8,000 each holiday season between Thanksgiving Day and New year's Day.

To reach Dick Lindsay:
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August 29 is federal court arraignment date for suspended Lee police chief Joseph Buffis accused of extortion and money laundering; selectmen set public hearing on pay pending prosecution

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(<http://connect.masslive.com/user/JimRussell1/index.html>) By Jim Russell
(<http://connect.masslive.com/user/JimRussell1/posts.html>)
on August 16, 2013 at 5:00 PM, updated August 17, 2013 at 7:31 PM

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SPRINGFIELD — Embattled Lee police chief
Joseph Buffis

JOSEPH BUFFIS

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Today on MassLive.com

(http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/08/lee_police_chief_joseph_buffis_1.html)
(http://ads.masslive.com/RealMedia/ads/click_ix.ads/www.masslive.com/news/20)
will be summoned to appear in U.S. District Court here on Aug. 29 to answer extortion
and money laundering charges.

The arraignment is scheduled for 2 p.m. before Judge
Kenneth P. Neiman.



Joseph Buffis

AP Photo/Ben
Garver, Berkshire
Eagle (file)

In a statement prepared by the U.S. attorney's office, the government says: "Buffis will be summoned to appear in court for his initial appearance."

Indictments were returned last week Buffis, 55, following a nearly year-long investigation by the FBI and state police.

Buffis, whose home was searched by state police and FBI late in 2012, but remained police chief, faces one count of extortion by a public official and three counts of money-laundering. The charges allege he shook down the proprietors of an inn in Lee, called only "Citizen 1" and "Citizen 2" in court

records while the owners were under investigation for a suspected prostitution ring.

Email

While there were no arrests in connection with the investigation, Buffis in early 2012 told the Berkshire Eagle that the owners had been arrested on prostitution charges, according to federal prosecutors. Trusting the chief's authority, the paper published the article and business at the unnamed inn plummeted, court records state.

Police officers sought criminal charges in connection with the probe, but Buffis intervened before an official hearing to that end.

"Buffis met alone with Citizen 1 and Citizen 2 to discuss resolving the case without any criminal charges being filed," wrote Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven H. Breslow in an 11-page indictment. "During this meeting Citizen 1 and Citizen 2 offered to donate \$1,000 to a local dog rescue fund," to avert the charges.

Instead, Buffis insisted they gift \$4,000 to the Laliberte Toy Fund, established by a late officer to purchase holiday toys for needy children in the area.

According to the charges, Buffis drafted a confidential agreement to avert charges but protect the town from liability, which the witnesses signed. Court officials essentially dropped the charges based on the agreement, the indictment says.

Buffis allegedly deposited the \$4,000 into the toy fund's bank account on Feb. 23, 2012 when the fund had a balance of just \$45. Over the next month, prosecutors contend he transferred the cash to the personal bank account of his and his wife. Buffis used the money as a source of cash and to make purchases at a liquor store, a hardware store and to make credit card payments.

He left just \$55 in the toy fund, the charges state.

It is unclear from the federal charges what, if any, merit the prostitution allegations held.

"He is innocent," Buffis' Great Barrington attorney **Lori Levinson** (http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/08/lee_police_chief_joseph_buffi_rpt-2) said in an email. "His answer to the charge will be 'not guilty' when we appear in court for arraignment."

Lee town administrator Robert Nason suspended Buffis without pay on Aug. 9, a day after the federal indictment was announced by U.S. attorney Carmen Ortiz.

Former Lee police chief Ronald Glidden was appointed by Nason to serve on an interim basis.

On Tuesday, Lee selectmen are due to convene a public hearing and decide whether Buffis should be paid while his criminal case is pending. #8220;Public Hearing: Police Chief Suspension," the selectmen's agenda states. The hearing is set for 7 p.m. at Town Hall.

Buffis was appointed chief in 2011 following Glidden's retirement. Buffis previously was a sergeant on the Lee force and has been a member of the department for more than 30 years.

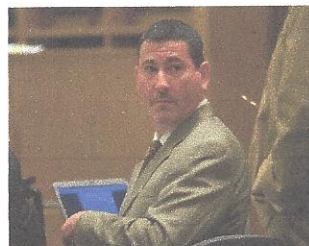
In a related matter, Berkshire district attorney David Capeless confirmed last week he

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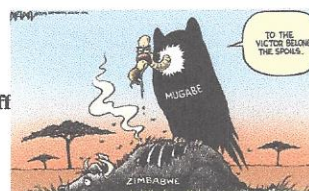
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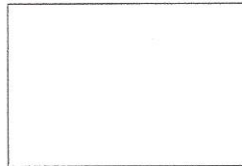
plans to reopen the prostitution case.

Capeless said he became alarmed when the chief ended the prosecution in February 2012. "I was very concerned a charge as serious as prostitution was being scuttled," Capeless said in an interview last week.

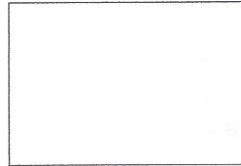
If convicted of the charges, Buffis faces up to 20 years in federal prison.

Staff writer Stephanie Barry also contributed to this story.

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Lee Police Chief Buffis indicted on extortion, money laundering

Chief's attorney: He 'has done absolutely nothing wrong'

By Andrew Amelinckx and Dick Lindsay, Berkshire Eagle Staff

(mailto:aamelinckx@berkshireeagle.com?subject=Berkshire Eagle Online:)

POSTED: 08/08/2013 02:01:18 PM EDT
UPDATED: 08/09/2013 06:49:40 PM EDT

SPRINGFIELD - A federal grand jury has indicted Lee's police chief on extortion and money laundering charges for allegedly forcing the owners of a local inn to donate money to a children's toy charity to avoid criminal prostitution charges.

In February 2012, Chief Joseph Buffis, 55, coerced the couple to donate \$4,000 to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund, a holiday toy fund he controlled, according to information from the U.S. Attorney's Office.

In exchange for the donation, Buffis agreed not to go forward with the charges against them, according to the indictment against him.

The couple had initially suggested making a \$1,000 donation to a local dog shelter, but Buffis insisted they donate \$4,000 to the fund, prosecutors said.

The couple, Tara Viola and Thomas Fusco, own The Inn at Laurel Lake on Route 7 & 20.

Buffis made the couple sign an agreement that prevented the disclosure of the deal.

According to prosecutors, the chief then transferred the money to his personal account and spent it at places, including a liquor store. The U.S. Attorney's Office said Buffis also lied to investigators about what became of the money.



(/portlet/article/html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=5323861)

Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis, seen here outside the police station in a Feb. 16, 2011, has been indicted on money laundering and extortion charges, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. (Eagle file)

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On Thursday, Buffis flatly denied the federal charges through his attorney, Lori Levinson of Great Barrington.

"Chief Buffis has done absolutely nothing wrong," Levinson said in a phone interview with The Eagle. "We will fight this case until he has been cleared of any wrongdoing."

She added, "He has enjoyed a long, distinguished and unblemished career in law enforcement and he hopes to continue serving the people of Lee."

Buffis, a Lee native who has spent 34 years on its police force, will not be arrested. Instead, he will be summonsed in to court for the charges, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. No court date has been set.

He faces up to 20 years in federal prison if convicted of the charges.

Buffis no longer manages the fund.

RELATED: [Backgrounder on Chief Buffis](http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_23822590) (http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_23822590)

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Lee Buffis
Indicted sign
agreement fully
cooperative

In January 2012, after a month-long joint investigation by the Lee police department and the Berkshire County Drug Task Force, the Lee police sought criminal complaints against Viola and Fusco, charging them with soliciting sexual favors for a fee, keeping a house of ill fame and conspiring to promote prostitution.

Attorney Elizabeth J. Quigley, who represents them, told The Eagle that her clients were victims in Buffis' scheme to extort money from them. At the time, the



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Lee Police Chief
Joseph Buffis
(Ben Garver)

couple believed the resolution was sanctioned by law enforcement and "was a proper way of resolving the matter," Quigley said. She called her clients "respected and involved members of the community and committed parents" who "wish to see justice done, but also want to continue to live their lives quietly and peaceably."

She said they were "fully cooperating with the U.S. Attorney's Office as any victim of this crime would and look forward to closure and resolution of the matter."

When the charges didn't go forward against the couple, Berkshire District Attorney David F. Capeless said he and the task force looked into what had happened.

Because of the close working relationship between local prosecutors and the police on various criminal matters, the case was handed off to the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office, Capeless said. Almost a year later, a federal grand jury returned four indictments: one count of extortion and three counts of money laundering.

Capeless stressed that the accusations are only leveled at Buffis and not the Lee Police Department of any other police officer.

"My office will continue to work proudly alongside the Lee Police Department to ensure safety and justice in the town of Lee," Capeless said, reiterating a statement he had made earlier in a press release.

Federal authorities are seeking public's assistance in this case. Anyone who donated cash or toys to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund or those who have applied to the fund are asked to contact the FBI's Springfield office at (413) 732-0159.

The Laliberte Toy Fund has annually provided toys for more than 120 children ages 9 and under in Lee, Tyringham and Lenox Dale. The fund served the Lee area until it was suspended for Christmas 2012 for "reorganization" purposes, which included Buffis no longer managing it, according to an Eagle article from December.

The toy fund was founded in 1958 by Edward J. Laliberte, a longtime Lee police officer. It was named for him after his death in the 1980s.

The Eagle has published the Laliberte lists during the annual holiday fund drive as a community service and isn't financially or managerially involved in the fund.

Related past stories ...

March 6, 2013: [Status quo for Lee police chief tied to holiday fund that is under investigation](http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_22733837/status-quo-lee-police-chief-tied-holiday-fund) (http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_22733837/status-quo-lee-police-chief-tied-holiday-fund)

March 5, 2013: [Federal criminal probe involves Laliberte Toy Fund in Lee](http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_22725276/federal-criminal-probe-involves-laliberte-toy-fund-lee) (http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_22725276/federal-criminal-probe-involves-laliberte-toy-fund-lee)

Feb. 24, 2012: [Secrecy in sex case involving owners of the Inn at Laurel Lake](http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_20034130) (http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_20034130)

Sept. 7, 2011: [New police chief named in Lee](http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_18839838?source=most_viewed) (http://www.berkshireeagle.com/ci_18839838?source=most_viewed)

Read the full announcement of the indictment below.

[Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis indicted](http://www.scribd.com/doc/158973226/Lee-Police-Chief-Joseph-Buffis-indicted) (http://www.scribd.com/doc/158973226/Lee-Police-Chief-Joseph-Buffis-indicted) by [The Berkshire Eagle](http://www.scribd.com/BerkshireEagle) (http://www.scribd.com/BerkshireEagle)

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A look back at 2012: Methadone clinic, politics at forefront

By Tony Dobrowolski, Berkshire Eagle Staff,
(mailto:TDobrowolski@berkshireeagle.com?subject=Berkshire Eagle Online:)

POSTED: 12/30/2012 12:10:39 AM EST | UPDATED: 8 MONTHS AGO

Sunday December 30, 2012
PITTSFIELD

Controversy over the location of a methadone clinic that morphed into a political issue. The first election involving the state's newly redrawn congressional districts. Two high-profile sexual assault cases. The slow progress of a murder case as it wends its way through the judicial system.

These are some of the stories that made headlines in Berkshire County in 2012, a year when legal matters became the dominant theme.

The year's top stories also include the FBI's search of the Lee Police Department, the controversial history of a drunk driver who caused a fatal motor vehicle accident in Sheffield, and allegations that the world's oldest profession -- prostitution -- took place at a historic inn in Lee.

But not everything was gloom and doom in the Berkshires.

Tanglewood, the county's top tourist attraction, celebrated its 75th anniversary with a star-studded gala in July. Following four years of anxiety, the parishioners of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Adams celebrated when the Diocese of Springfield allowed the 110-year-old structure to reopen as a place of worship.

And who could forget the weather, which featured an exceptionally mild winter, moderate drought conditions through the spring and summer, and a love tap from Hurricane Sandy, a Category 1 storm that devastated the East Coast but barely touched the Berkshires.

Other items of note included the ongoing controversy regarding the placement of the belvedere in Lenox's Kennedy Park, accomplishments by Pittsfield-based teams in sports, and the Pittsfield Public Schools' failure to apply for a significant chunk of federal funding due to action by its teachers union.

Today we feature the top Berkshire County stories of 2012. The list, compiled by the newspaper's reporters and editors, ranks the stories in order of importance.

1. Methadone clinic

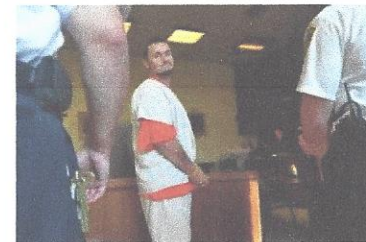
The controversy began in June when word leaked out that Spectrum Healthcare Systems of Worcester was about to finalize a deal to place a methadone clinic in a mostly residential neighborhood on Stoddard Avenue in Pittsfield. That site came under consideration after the city denied Spectrum's request to place a similar facility downtown on Summer Street in 2011. That action led to the company suing the city in federal court.

Mayor Daniel L. Bianchi declined to sign off on the Stoddard Avenue location following angry protests by the affected residents (see picture). But after Berkshire District Attorney David F. Capeless questioned the "transparency" surrounding the clinic's possible location, word soon surfaced that Spectrum was interested in placing the methadone clinic in the

downtown location the city had rejected before. In August, the Summer Street location became official when it was included in an out-of-court settlement of the federal lawsuit, which also required the city to pay Spectrum \$100,000.



Click photo to enlarge
10. St. Stan's Church re-opens (Eagle file photo)



4. Murder cases (Eagle file photo)

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Pittsfield: Theater group to pe



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9. Prostitution case in Lee (Eagle file photo)

Next, questions arose over City Solicitor Kathleen Degnan's handling of the negotiations with Spectrum, which led three city councilors to claim she had misled the 11-member panel. Ward 1 Councilor Kathleen Yon filed a petition with the council seeking a no-confidence vote against Degnan, a measure that was supported by four colleagues.

Yon withdrew her petition after a contentious City Council meeting in October, but one month later Councilor at large Melissa Mazzeo filed a complaint with the state Attorney General's

Office claiming the five councilors who had supported that petition had violated the state's open meeting law.

The Council settled the matter by agreeing to limit the amount of public discussion among its 11 members before the agenda for its meetings is released. Spectrum's clinic opened on Summer Street in October without incident.

2. Politics & elections

As veteran Congressman John W. Olver chose to leave office after 21 years in Washington, the state's congressional districts were redrawn based on the results of the 2010 federal census. Under redistricting, the 1st Congressional District became part of the district governed by U.S. Rep. Richard E. Neal, which meant Berkshire County would be in



(/portlet/article/html/imageDisplay.jsp?contentItemRelationshipId=4854750)

7. Weather extremes (Eagle file photo)

the same jurisdiction with the city of Springfield.

Anticipating the redistricting, Middle Berkshire Register of Deeds Andrea F. Nuciforo Jr. of Pittsfield had announced that he planned to run for Olver's seat in 2009, a year before Olver was elected to his last two-year term. But the early start didn't pay off. Bolstered by his support outside the county, Neal, a former Springfield mayor, easily defeated Nuciforo and activist Bill Shein of Alford in the Democratic Party primary in September. There were no Republican Party

candidates in the field.

Among Berkshire County's contingent in the state Legislature, only William "Smitty" Pignatelli of Lenox faced an opponent. The longest-serving member of the Berkshire delegation, Pignatelli easily defeated Green-Rainbow Party candidate Scott Laugenour in the general election in November.

In August, Michelle Obama became the 11th first lady, and third in a row, to visit the Berkshires when she attended fundraising events at the Colonial Theatre and at Gov. Deval Patrick's home in Richmond.

In December, state Sen. Benjamin B. Downing of Pittsfield said he would consider a run for U.S. Sen. John F. Kerry's seat if Kerry's nomination for Secretary of State is approved.

3. Sexual assault cases

Two separate incidents rocked the Berkshires in 2012.

In May, Scott Muir, 37, a former counselor at the former Stockbridge Plain School, was charged with molesting three young girls between 2003 and 2004, when he worked for the Berkshire Hills Regional School District.

After the town of Stockbridge suspended Muir indefinitely without pay from his positions as the town's facilities manager and emergency services coordinator, police continued to investigate the case, and in July two more teens came forward with similar allegations against Muir.

In all, 20 charges have been filed against Muir, whose trial is scheduled for September 2013 in Berkshire Superior Court.

In October, four Pittsfield teens -- 18-year-olds Adam Liccardi, Emmanuel Bile and Justin King, and 17-year-old Caleb Womack -- were accused of raping a University of Massachusetts student in her dorm room in Amherst.

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Pittsfield: Theater group to pe

The four were arrested in Pittsfield, indicted by a grand jury, and arraigned in Hampshire Superior Court in Northampton. A pre-trial hearing is scheduled for March 19. Three of the four were signed into the dorm by an unnamed student, but it remains unclear how the fourth suspect entered. The alleged assault has prompted a full review of security procedures at UMass.

4. Murder cases

The slaying of three men in Becket in August 2011 -- The Eagle's top story last year -- remained in the headlines as the case slowly wound through the legal system.

It's still unclear whether Adam Lee Hall, 35, of Peru, David Chalue, 45, of North Adams, and Caius Veiovis, 32, of Pittsfield, will go to trial in 2013 for allegedly killing Pittsfield residents David Glasser, Edward Frampton and Robert Chadwell. A fourth man, David Casey, 64, of Canaan, N.Y., is charged as an accessory. A trial date could be set at the next pre-trial hearing, on Jan. 31.

Police say Hall carried out the slayings to prevent Glasser from testifying against him in an upcoming trial. Frampton and Chadwell allegedly were killed to keep them from being witnesses to the Glasser slaying.

In June, lawyers for Hall, Chalue and Veiovis filed motions to dismiss the charges against their clients, but a hearing to argue the matter was canceled when the Berkshire District Attorney's office resubmitted the cases to a grand jury. The three defendants were reindicted and rearraigned in August, although the charges remained largely unchanged.

The four defendants also changed lawyers this year, with all but Casey hiring attorneys who live outside of Berkshire County. Hall's original attorney, William A. Rota of Pittsfield, was allowed to withdraw from the case in September after his client met twice in August with state police investigators without Rota's knowledge. Rota claimed Hall revealed his defense strategy during those meetings. The pace of the case stalled in October as Hall's new attorney acclimated himself with it.

In January, Berkshire District Attorney David F. Capeless maintained his office had been diligent in handling previous cases against Hall after it was reported that his office had either dismissed or failed to pursue multiple charges against Hall between 1997 and 2006.

Elsewhere, the 2010 slaying of former Lee High boys' basketball star Jahda Martin was resolved in the spring when Terrance Brown of Springfield received a 10- to 12-year state prison sentence, and three of the four other defendants were sentenced to various amounts of jail time.

Police reports indicated the incident was gang-related, and that the attackers mistakenly believed Martin was a police informant.

5. FBI searches Lee Police Department

Although details of the incident still have not been made public, the FBI on Nov. 19 performed a court-authorized search of both the Lee Police Department and a private residence in Pittsfield.

Joseph Buffis, a 33-year veteran of Lee law enforcement who had been named the town's police chief in September, responded by hiring an attorney.

The FBI is working on the case with state police detectives assigned to the Berkshire District Attorney's office, according to FBI supervisor Mark Karangekis. He has declined to comment further.

In December, Lee's Patrol Officers Union, which includes all of the town's full-time police officers except Buffis, responded to the FBI's investigation by stating they aren't the focus of it.

6. Tanglewood anniversary

Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summer home, celebrated its 75th anniversary with a gala concert in July in the Shed.

The 21 2-hour event, combined with a dinner for contributors, brought in \$1.4 million before expenses, which BSO Managing Director Mark Volpe said was the largest amount ever raised for a single concert at Berkshire County's top tourist attraction.

The BSO's nine-week summer season also included nine world premieres of new compositions, including one by Andre Previn.

7. Weather extremes

After getting pounded by snowstorm after snowstorm during the winter of 2010-11, Berkshire County experienced the opposite in 2011-12. Last winter had the third-lowest amount of snow since record-keeping began at Pittsfield Municipal Airport in 1938. Of the 46 inches that fell last winter, 20 came during the freak late-October snowstorm of 2011.

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Pittsfield: Theater group to pe

Temperatures soared, too. The four-month period comprising November to February was the warmest ever in the Berkshires, according to the airport's records. And in the 100 days between Dec. 1 and March 10, above-normal temperatures were reported in the county on 70 of them.

Hot, dry conditions continued for most of the rest of 2012, as the National Weather Service had the Berkshires listed in its moderate drought category through the spring and summer. The dry conditions contributed to a two-day brush fire on October Mountain in April that Lee officials said was the town's largest and most challenging blaze in 40 years.

Hurricane Sandy devastated the East Coast in late October, but it only grazed the Berkshires, bringing small amounts of precipitation and creating wind gusts that downed some trees and power lines. In Pennsylvania, however, an 81-year-old Williamstown resident died when her car slid off a road during a snowstorm generated by the massive hurricane.

8. Repeat drunken driver charged in fatality

In February, a car accident on Route 7 in Sheffield that killed 24-year-old resident Moira Banks-Dobson received increased notoriety when the man who allegedly caused the accident -- 35-year-old Frederick Weller of Connecticut -- was charged with drunken driving for the seventh time.

It was then learned that Weller, who has been charged with drunken driving in four states since 1994, had only been prosecuted as a repeat offender in only two of those cases.

Prosecutors in Berkshire County plan to charge Weller as a five-time offender, the state's most serious repeat offender charge. In addition, Weller is charged with motor vehicle homicide. His trial tentatively is scheduled for March in Berkshire Superior Court.

9. Prostitution case in Lee

In January, the couple that owns the Inn at Laurel Lake in Lee -- Tara Viola and Thomas Fusco -- were charged with running a prostitution ring out of the historic lakeside bed and breakfast on Route 20. They have owned the inn since 1996.

According to police, Viola and Fusco had discretely tried to advertise the prostitution service on the Internet under the guise of the wife's massage business. Viola is a legally licensed massage therapist.

Authorities were alerted to the online advertisement after it had been posted for some time, and they launched a monthlong investigation that culminated in the couple being charged.

Viola was charged with soliciting sexual favors for a fee. Both Viola and Fusco were charged with keeping a house of ill repute and conspiring to promote prostitution. The case was resolved in February at a hearing before a magistrate in Southern Berkshire District Court that was closed to the public. The records have been sealed.

10. St. Stan's Church re-opens

After an anxious year as the appeal of the status of their church wound its way through the Vatican's legal system, the parishioners of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Adams rejoiced in February when the Diocese of Springfield ordered the historic structure re-opened as a place of worship.

The diocese had ordered the 110-year-old church closed in December 2008 so that it could be merged with two other parishes. Parishioners appealed the Diocese's decision to the Vatican, then staged a vigil that lasted for 1,150 days until the decision was reversed. St. Stan's is now part of the Parish of Pope John Paul the Great.

The church was packed in late February when the Eucharist that signifies the sacrament of Holy Communion was returned to the church's tabernacle. The first Mass was celebrated on Palm Sunday in April.

Special mentions

Monuments and memorials: The saga regarding the placement of the belvedere in Kennedy Park in Lenox remained on hold at the end of 2012 as town officials and opponents await a ruling on whether a lawsuit filed by 20 citizens in May should be dismissed. The suit seeks the removal of the monument; lawyers for the town filed a motion in Suffolk Superior Court in September seeking the lawsuit's dismissal. The 20 citizens are seeking the removal of the memorial that New York-based architect Michael Fieldman had erected in the park in honor of his son, Dr. Jordan Fieldman, a BMC physician who died of cancer in 2006 at the age of 38. The citizens say the belvedere is an obtrusive nuisance that violates the state's Scenic Mountain Act.

Athletic accomplishments: Not only did Mount Greylock Regional High School's football team set a Berkshire County record in the fall by winning 33 games in a row, the Mounties became the first Berkshire team to win three consecutive Super Bowls since 1994.

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England championship in Quincy. The Pittsfield All-Stars finished fifth out of 10 teams in the World Series and in September were honored by the Red Sox at Fenway Park.

Education: In November, the Pittsfield Public Schools missed out on an opportunity to receive as much as \$20 million in available federal funding. The city needed approval from its teachers union to apply to the federal grant program, but the United Educators of Pittsfield voted 135-41 against filing the application, citing "legal," "moral," "professional" and "financial" issues as the reasons for its decision. Teachers unions in Los Angeles, Palm Beach, Fla., Las Vegas and Maryland also declined to approve their district's filing applications for the "Race For The Top" grants on similar grounds. Pittsfield School Superintendent Gordon Noseworthy and UEP President Gail Yates later declined an invitation to discuss the matter before the City Council.

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TDobrowolski@berkshireeagle.com (<mailto:TDobrowolski@berkshireeagle.com>).

or (413) 496-6224.

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Lee Police Chief Indicted for Extortion and Money Laundering

Alleged Activity Includes Coercing Payment from Individuals Facing Prostitution Charges and Diverting Money Through Children's Toy Fund

U.S. Attorney's Office
August 08, 2013

District of Massachusetts
(617) 748-3100

BOSTON—A federal grand jury in Springfield returned an indictment today against Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis for extortion and three counts of money laundering.

It is alleged that in February 2012 Buffis, 55, of Pittsfield, acting in his official capacity as Lee Police Department chief, extorted a \$4,000 "donation" from two individuals who were facing prostitution-related charges. The "donation" was made payable to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund, a holiday toy fund that Buffis controlled. Buffis deposited the \$4,000 check into the Toy Fund's bank account and quickly withdrew \$3,990, which he then deposited into a joint bank account that he operated with his wife. The diverted money was then used to pay for various personal expenses. Buffis is alleged to have lied to law enforcement about the disposition of the funds.

"To be entrusted to serve and protect is a great honor and privilege. The alleged actions of Chief Buffis disgrace the many incredible law enforcement stewards who uphold and enforce the law. Actions like these threaten the credibility of our justice system, and we will not stand idly by and allow the trust of our communities to be violated," said United States Attorney Carmen M. Ortiz.

Berkshire District Attorney David F. Capeless said, "The allegations contained in the federal indictment describe a serious breach of the public trust, and my office will continue to work with United States Attorney Ortiz and her office to see that justice is done and order restored. It should be made clear that these accusations are made against one man, Joseph Buffis, not the Lee Police Department or any other members of its force. My office will continue to work proudly alongside the Lee Police Department to ensure safety and justice in the town of Lee and throughout Berkshire County."

"This is another example of a successful investigation and extraordinary teamwork between the FBI, the Massachusetts State Police, the United States Attorney's Office, and the Berkshire District Attorney's Office. The conduct charged in this indictment demonstrates law enforcement's commitment to pursue public corruption at any level. We will not tolerate these acts, especially from those who have sworn to serve and protect the community and its citizens," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Vincent B. Lisi.

If convicted, Buffis faces a maximum of 20 years in prison on each of the counts followed by five years of supervised release, and \$250,000 fine. Buffis will be summoned to appear in court for his initial appearance.

U.S. Attorney Ortiz; District Attorney Capeless; FBI Special Agent in Charge Lisi; and Colonel Timothy P. Alben, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police, made the announcement today. The U.S. Attorney's Office would like to thank District Attorney Capeless and the Massachusetts State Police Berkshire Detective Unit for uncovering the alleged violations and initiating the investigation which led to today's indictment.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven H. Breslow of Ortiz's Springfield Branch Office.

We are seeking the public's assistance in this case. For those who have donated cash or toys to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund or for those who have applied to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund, please contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Springfield Resident Agency, at (413) 732-0159. Please contact the FBI if you have any information, questions, or concerns regarding this matter.

The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendant is presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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Lee police chief fired over cellphone billing

Wednesday, August 21, 2013

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By: Associated Press

LEE, Mass. — A western Massachusetts police chief who's been indicted on federal extortion and money laundering charges has been fired, but not because of the federal allegations.

The Lee Board of Selectmen unanimously agreed Tuesday night to fire Chief Joseph Buffis for what they said was improperly billing the town for his personal cellphone.

The board said the 55-year-old Buffis billed the town for nearly \$5,000 over two years to pay for his family cellphone plan.

Buffis did not attend, but the Berkshire Eagle (<http://bit.ly/16LeIk6>) reports that his lawyer said she would appeal the termination.

Federal prosecutors say Buffis used his position to extort a \$4,000 donation in February 2012 to a charity fund he controlled, then withdrew most of the money and used it for personal expenses. He denies the charges.

Information from: The Berkshire (Mass.) Eagle, <http://www.berkshireeagle.com>

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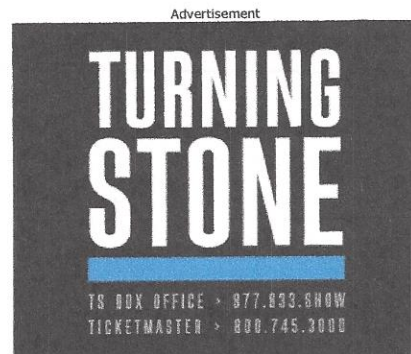
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Lee select board: indictment no factor in chief's firing
Aug. 20, 2013, 11:00 PM EDT [2:51]



Select board: indictment no factor in chief's firing

Posted at: 08/21/2013 12:54 AM | Updated at: 08/21/2013 12:51 PM
By: Dan Levy

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LEE, MASSACHUSETTS - It was a stunning decision that surprised many residents of Lee, Mass.

With a federal indictment hanging over his head, Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis was fired Tuesday night by the town select board. But, strange as it seems, the select board members insist the firing had nothing to do with the indictment.

The crowd inside Lee Town Hall was overflowing and the sentiment was overriding with emotion. Most people seemed to be expecting some action against Buffis, but not the action taken.

Earlier this month, Buffis was indicted by a federal grand jury on extortion and money laundering charges after the U.S. attorney said Buffis looked the other way when two town residents were suspected of prostitution related charges.

Those charges disappeared after the couple donated \$4,000 to a holiday toy drive for children, that Buffis controlled.

After the indictment, Berkshire County District Attorney David Capeless reinstated charges against Tara and Thomas Fusco, proprietors of the Inn at Laurel Lake.

After Lori Levinson, Buffis' attorney, reminded board members that her client was entitled to the presumption of innocence, and urged them not to suspend him or his pay, the town administrator dropped a bombshell.

Robert Nason announced to the town select board members, and the packed house, that Buffis had misappropriated \$5,000 in public funds by allegedly allowing taxpayers foot the bill for the cell phones used by his wife and two children.

"The town has requested Mr. Buffis' resignation in light of these revelations and additionally the town has demanded restitution," Nason read in a prepared statement.

The three select board members, David Consolati, Gordon Bailey, and Patricia Carlino voted unanimously to terminate Buffis.

"I'm stunned at the board's actions," Levinson stated, "I think it's outrageous."

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Speaks out

Jeremia Pollard, the town's attorney, said the select board members had no other choice to make.

"We don't pay for peoples' family phone plans in the town on the taxpayers' backs," he said. "Plain and simple. Period."

Not everyone in town thought it was plain and simple. Beverly Trombley, a long time Lee resident, thinks it was suspiciously too convenient for Nason to discover the alleged cell phone discrepancy after Buffis had been chief for more than a year.

"Now, suddenly it becomes the ax with which to fire the chief," Trombley questioned, "That's baloney!"

Greg Juskalian thinks the firing came too quickly and believes the cell phone issue may have been just a misunderstanding.

"What is (Chief Buffis) supposed to do?" Juskalian wondered out loud, "Thirty-four years (as a Lee police officer). How is he supposed to defend himself without pay? He has no income."

Levinson says, at this point, she's not sure what recourse her client may have. She does reiterate that Buffis did "absolutely nothing wrong", and she says he will fight the charges fervently.

The select board also announced Tuesday night that they would begin the process to find a new full time chief immediately.

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Former police chief pleads not guilty

By Matt Caron

Kara Dominick

Updated: Thursday, August 29, 2013, 6:38 PM EDT
 Published: Thursday, August 29, 2013, 3:33 AM EDT

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Lee is in need of a new police chief

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Lee police chief indicted by grand jury

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. (WWLP) - Former Lee Police Chief Joe Buffis pleaded not guilty at his arraignment in a Springfield courtroom Thursday on federal charges of money laundering and extortion.

He was released on \$100,000 unsecured bail and scheduled to return to federal court December 4th for a hearing.

Buffis was recently fired by the town and now, there's a search to replace him.

This all began in November of 2012, when the FBI conducted a raid on the Lee Police Department. Days later, Buffis got a lawyer.

On August 9, Buffis was suspended without pay, and on August 20, the town's Board of Selectmen voted to fire him. Buffis was let go, not because of the investigation, but because he allegedly charged the town with his family's cell phone plan.

Buffis was indicted on federal charges of extortion and money laundering for allegedly taking \$4,000 from a Lee couple and depositing the money into a toy fund account that he controlled. He allegedly then used that money for himself.

His lawyer told 22News that they will fight the charges.

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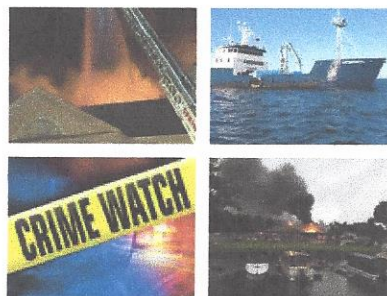
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