

2701 IMPERIAL AVENUE

The structure at 2701 Imperial Avenue is a three story commercial-residential building located on one of the busiest streets in the southeast area of San Diego. Each of the three floors possess small self-contained apartments. The bottom floor has a converted illegal gambling room on the west side and a Mexican fast food restaurant on the east side. None of the rooms contains any cooking facilities and a bathroom and shower is shared by each floor.

In September of 1988, the Walking Enforcement Campaign Against Narcotics (WECAN) detail, which is assigned daily to the busiest drug infested areas in the city, began working the area of 2700 Imperial Avenue. Sergeant Robert O'Donnell had received a steady flow of complaints about the drug activity surrounding this property. When WECAN initiated enforcement measures at this address, the officers immediately realized that selective drug enforcement would not be sufficient in eliminating long-standing criminal activities.

The problem was more than narcotic activity occurring at 2701 Imperial. Illegal gambling took place downstairs, a murder had been committed in the building six months prior, and there was no on-site manager. It was difficult for officers to determine whether the structure was a commercially managed property, even though there was a Mexican food restaurant, a hotel and an apartment building. They could find no one on the premises to take responsibility for the condition of the property.

Officer Bobby Wight of the WECAN detail assumed the lead role in searching for answers to the questions at 2701 Imperial Avenue. When Officer Wight attempted to locate the owner, he discovered that the owner had been brutally murdered two years prior. He spoke with the gas and electric company's security department and located the person who was listed on the monthly billing. Her name was Sadie Craft, the sister of the slain owner. When Wight spoke with Craft over the telephone, she was uncooperative. She gave Officer Wight the phone number of an attorney who was handling the estate matters.

Officer Wight telephoned the attorney and learned that the property, as well as the rest of the estate, was insolvent and no money was available for repairs. Wight discovered the property at 2701 Imperial was for sale. He also learned there was an on-site manager at the address whose name was James Harris.

Wight had the Fire Marshall and Housing Inspector compile a formal investigative report regarding the condition of the property. A problem arose when the inspectors could not locate anyone to serve with the violations as James Harris could not be found. A month later Wight learned that Harris has been arrested in a major crack cocaine ring.

As Officer Wight facilitated communication between the estate, lawyers, the housing and fire inspectors, and the narcotics and vice units that were interested in the illegal activity at this address, he received a telephone call from the Great American Bank. The previous owner had defaulted on a \$400,000 loan and the bank was in the process of securing the deceased owner's assets.

The estate had no money to repair the property, the on-site manager was a major drug dealer, a large banking institution was attempting to seize the building, and drug dealing continued to thrive at the address. While Officer Wight continued corresponding and communicating with the Fire Marshall, the Building Inspector, the bank representative, and the estate lawyer, he waited for the court decision. Between September of 1988 and January of 1989, over 134 drug related arrests were made at 2701 Imperial Avenue. Wight kept all of the interested parties informed of the ongoing activities.

On April 21, 1989, Hallmark Management Association was named receiver of the estate. They immediately began serving eviction notices, removed the pay telephone from in front of the building as it attracted drug dealers and immediately installed full-time security officers at the property. Officer

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Wight discovered that the bank has initiated foreclosure proceedings against the property. For the present the illegal activity has ended at 2701 Imperial Avenue. Although Officer Wight has been transferred to a different area command, he continues to monitor the activities at this location.