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Lingerie Store Doubling as Strip Club Busted by the City

East side property was the scene of shootouts, drug dealing, violent crime, liquor law violations

COLUMBUS, OH—Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein announced today that the City of Columbus secured an emergency court order to vacate and shutter an east side lingerie store called “Sexxy 4 Less” that was a front for an underground strip club called “Club Sexxy.” According to court documents, the Columbus Division of Police began covert surveillance of the premises earlier this summer, obtaining evidence of illegal drug and alcohol sales. Patrons reportedly were told that the illicit club was “drug friendly.” Investigators also linked a July shootout at the premises to a homicide that had occurred a month earlier.

The club operators, Lawrence Rutledge and Sharonda Dudley Rutledge, were a husband and wife team with a history of felony convictions, including aggravated robbery, felonious assault, breaking and entering, forgery, improper handling of a firearm, and aggravated drug trafficking.

City Attorney Klein filed a request for an *ex parte* temporary restraining order in the Franklin County Environmental Court to board up the property located at [1471 East Livingston Avenue](#), which is two blocks away from another dangerous and illegal after-hours club that the [city shut down last month](#). Families with children lived in apartments directly above the lingerie store.

“There were armed security guards with body armor, and even the dancers were packing heat, which tells you all you need to know about the danger this illegal club posed to employees, patrons, and the residents living there,” said Columbus City Attorney Zach Klein. **“Just last month, we shut down an illegal after-hours club two blocks away that was the scene of gang violence, shootings, murder, felonious assault, and drug dealing. Hopefully our efforts in partnership with the Columbus Division of Police will help restore some peace of mind to the neighborhood.”**

On July 21, 2019, the city’s ShotSpotter alert system detected up to 17 shots fired in a shoot-out that wounded two individuals at the premises. A subsequent police investigation linked spent shell-casings from this incident to a homicide that occurred on June 2, 2019.

On August 31, 2019, detectives conducting an undercover investigation obtained a covert purchase of cocaine and also noted that illegal alcohol sales were taking place at the premises.

On September 15, 2019 one of the dancers, who claimed she was working at an “exotic dancewear party” at the club, filed a police report that her firearm was stolen from the premises.

On September 18, 2019, law enforcement officials sent a warning letter via certified mail to the property owner notifying him of his responsibility to abate the criminal nuisance activity occurring at the premises, or face legal action. The letter was signed as received, but the illegal activity continued.

On September 28, 2019, the ongoing police investigation obtained a covert purchase of cocaine from the premises. Illegal alcohol sales also were still taking place.

“It’s extremely disturbing to know that children and their families were living in apartments directly above this illegal operation,” said Assistant City Attorney Heidi Tawardos. “Most troubling was the fact that the shoot-out occurred in the parking lot of the club, which was shared by the families living there.”

A follow-up hearing for a preliminary and permanent injunction against the property owners and the club operators is scheduled for 12:00 p.m. on October 21, 2019. At this hearing, the court can order the property to remain closed for up to one year.

A copy of the court’s [order](#) is available online.

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