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Investigative Reporter
Glenn Selig



FDLE

Did the Florida Department of Law Enforcement ignore evidence of a sex scandal involving public officials? That's what a Tampa police detective claims.

And he says his career was ruined because he refused to back off.

Until now, he's never told his story. But he's not keeping quiet anymore.

It's the seedy side of Tampa. The underground sex industry. Where lingerie shops offer services like body massages. Tampa police detective Dale "Chip" DeBlock infiltrated shops that sold sex. He went in undercover, capturing the evidence on videotape. His investigations revealed many of them were nothing more than fronts for prostitution.

"We started off with 79 shops in the City of Tampa," DeBlock says in an EXCLUSIVE interview with FOX13 Investigates' Glenn Selig. "We had it down to 19 shops."



Dale "Chip" DeBlock

Detective DeBlock made headlines. He received glowing job evaluations. And he was named Officer of the Month. "I was looking at a pretty good career at one point."

But the course of his career changed three years ago after he began to investigate claims from a woman we'll call "Samantha." She told him a prosecutor at the Hillsborough State Attorney's office was working against him by tipping off the clubs.

"Much to my surprise the information I was given just started checking out," DeBlock recalls.

As it checked out, she told him more; that politicians and prosecutors in Tampa were clients of the clubs. He's talking publicly for the very first time. "I just think that people should be aware of what's going on."

What exactly is going on? DeBlock says he was just trying to find out if someone was compromising his investigations. But in pursuing that, he says he uncovered evidence of blackmail and corruption.



Raid on sex club

"Samantha" agreed to talk with us if we didn't show her face. She worked at a lingerie shop called "Body Works." DeBlock busted it as a front for prostitution. We obtained copies of Detective Deblock's notes from Tampa PD using the Florida Open Records law. They show "Samantha" told him "...a prominent man with political... power went to (Body Works) and had sessions..."

"Samantha" identified that man as Harry Lee Coe, III. At the time, Harry Lee Coe was the State Attorney--Hillsborough County's most powerful law enforcement officer.

When we talked with her, she confirmed the information in DeBlock's notes. She told us Coe was a frequent customer of Body Works. And there's more.

She says as part of her job, she once secretly recorded video of Coe having sex with a prostitute.

"It shows him going to get into the hot tub and sitting down," she says, "then it shows her taking her bathing suit off."



Harry Lee Coe

She says the tape was made for blackmail in case Body Works had trouble with the law. "Just the general threat of it would have been enough to put the breaks on."



Dax Stromberger

Dax Stromberger, another former employee of Body Works, says he heard about the tape. He says Coe was just one of many prominent people who went to Body Works for sex.

"We had a few police officers. There were lawyers, doctors and (Hillsborough County) judges," Stromberger says.

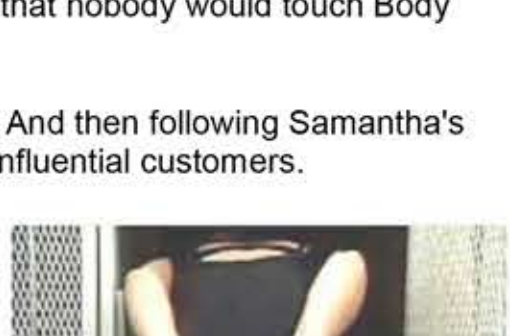
He says he never worried about a police raid because Body Works had those powerful clients. "I always figured that nobody would touch Body Works."

But Detective DeBlock raided it in 1998. And then following Samantha's tips, he began investigating a connection between the sex industry and its influential customers.

And that's not all. Detective DeBlock says he uncovered a link to organized crime. Another confidential informant told DeBlock the mob controlled Tampa's sex industry and possibly government officials who were clients of the sex clubs.

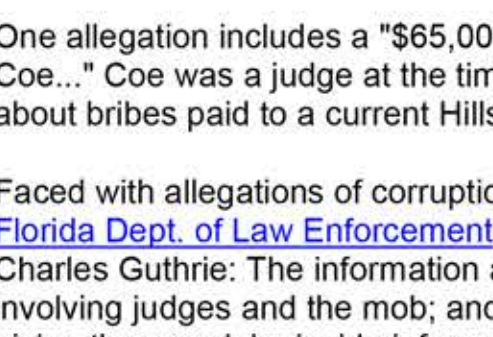
The informant gave DeBlock "...detailed information..." about "...attempts to corrupt public officials"

One allegation includes a "\$65,000 payment made... to... Harry Lee Coe..." Coe was a judge at the time. And the same source told DeBlock about bribes paid to a current Hillsborough County judge.



Employee busted at sex club

Faced with allegations of corruption on a massive scale, according to Deblock's calendar, he met with the [Florida Dept. of Law Enforcement](#). He says over time he turned over all his information to FDLE supervisor Charles Guthrie: The information about Coe and the videotape; the \$65,000 payoff; the questionable deals involving judges and the mob; and the tip that started it all--that a prosecutor in the State Attorney's office was giving the sex clubs inside information.



Bret Bartlett

DeBlock's partner at the time Bret Bartlett says he remembers FDLE seemed especially interested in the information about Coe.

But what happened next nearly destroyed DeBlock's career. "After that point in time things just started to deteriorate."

DeBlock says State Attorney Harry Lee Coe's office took aim at him. "The Hillsborough County State Attorney's office filed multiple Internal Affairs complaints against me, I believe there were 21 allegations altogether."

The allegations fondling a female suspect and withholding evidence. He was eventually cleared of all wrongdoing.

But during the months Internal Affairs investigated DeBlock some big news broke. Hillsborough County State Attorney Harry Lee Coe committed suicide.



FDLE supervisor Charles Guthrie

FDLE supervisor Charles Guthrie led the investigation into Coe's death. Remember, Charles Guthrie is the same agent DeBlock says took his information about Coe. So, FOX13 Investigates asked FDLE for all of the documents agents gathered during the Coe death investigation. But in the stacks of evidence FDLE gave us, there's nothing about Det. DeBlock or any of his leads.

Glenn spoke briefly months ago with FDLE Supervisor Charles Guthrie. He asked Guthrie if DeBlock gave him information. Guthrie told him, "I'm not saying it didn't happen. It doesn't sound familiar." When Glenn followed up to arrange an interview, FDLE's public information officer Rick Morera told Glenn, "No one is willing to speak.. about Harry Lee Coe" and

FDLE is "unwilling to provide any information at this time."

In the final report for the Coe death investigation, FDLE concluded Coe's suicide was the result of mounting gambling debts.

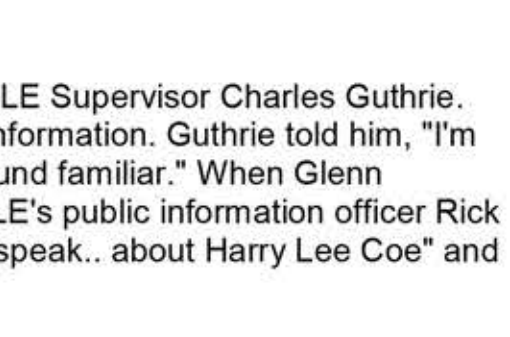
"My conclusions were based on what my office did, what FDLE did, and what I was aware of at the time," says Pinellas County State Attorney Bernie McCabe, who was appointed by Gov. Jeb Bush to investigate Coe's death. He says FDLE never mentioned Det. DeBlock or his information.

Glenn Selig, FOX13: He says he gave information to the FDLE before Mr. Coe committed suicide and you're saying you don't know anything about it?

Bernie McCabe, Special Prosecutor: I don't know anything about it.

Glenn Selig, FOX13: Shouldn't you?

Bernie McCabe, Special Prosecutor: I don't know.



Bernie McCabe

In a letter to Governor Bush, dated November of 2000, McCabe says, "There was no evidence found of any corrupt or external influences that could be a factor in Coe's death." The letter even says that "allegations (of corruption) were investigated and found to be unsubstantiated."

Glenn Selig, FOX13: Had they investigated this as part of the death investigation you would've heard about it?

Bernie McCabe, Special Prosecutor: I would assume so.

When we contacted FDLE to find out what became of DeBlock's leads, they sent us letters saying the FDLE "...does not possess any such written statements or videotapes."

But when we asked for information alleging a connection between organized crime and Coe, FDLE said they had two pieces of information. They said they couldn't release them because one came from a "federal criminal justice agency" and the other was part of "active criminal intelligence information." But they acknowledged the information was not considered in the death investigation.

FOX13 Investigates wanted to ask why not? But FDLE refused to do an interview.

Glenn Selig, FOX13: Do you think that a sex tape, involvement with prostitutes or links to corruption, could possibly be a motive to contribute to a suicide?

Bernie McCabe, Special Prosecutor: Were something like that to exist and be legitimate and he thought it had been recorded and he thought there was an investigation getting ready to come that's one of the things that I would've included as a possible motivating factor, certainly. But I had no credible information that such influences existed.

Det. DeBlock insists he gave credible information to FDLE. He's baffled as to why FDLE would say it has nothing from him. And "Samantha" who claims to have recorded the sex tape says she told her story to FDLE. But FDLE told us it has no record of her statement. "I'll never report anything else. Never. Ever. Report anything else. This is why people don't report anything. What good did it do?"

Dax Stromberger, another Body Works employee, was mentioned in the Detective's reports. He says no one from FDLE ever questioned him.

Glenn Selig, FOX13: Did anyone ever ask you any questions about the videotapes?

Stromberger: No.

Det. DeBlock believes the information he says he gave to FDLE could've put some powerful people behind bars. But he says when he tried to blow the whistle he paid the price. He was reassigned. Now instead of investigating Tampa's underground sex industry, he tracks down stolen cars.

Detective DeBlock has filed a whistleblower lawsuit against the police department. Because there's a lawsuit pending, [Tampa Police Dept.](#) told us it has no comment.

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Website started by Det. DeBlock to help whistleblower officers and those who become targets of Internal Affairs investigations.

