



Valerie Knight is a 49-year-old single mother who co-owned Soquel Lomee along with 74-year-old Bill Grace.

'It wasn't a business of selling sex'

Crime and criminals - B&W

By **MAY WONG**

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SANTA CRUZ — After eight months of silence, a Santa Cruz woman accused of maintaining a house of prostitution at a Soquel massage parlor spoke Friday for the first time about the case.

"I can't sit back here anymore and have people think the worst of me and be the laughing stock of this community," Valerie Knight said in a phone interview.

Knight, who pleaded no contest to the misdemeanor charge on Thursday, said she did so because it would have been "financially ruinous" for her to take the case to trial.

The 49-year-old single mother denied the authorities' allegations that her business, Soquel Lomee, was a front for a brothel.

"It wasn't a business of selling sex," Knight said.

"We dealt with stress. We did full body therapeutic massage. (My business) made it possible for people who were stressed out from work to go home relaxed, and not take it out on their children. I thought I was offering a service to my community."

Knight said her employees signed contracts agreeing they would not do illegal acts.

"As far as I'm concerned, there was no prostitution there," Knight said. "We did not do intimate massage. If somebody crossed the line there, it was not to my knowledge."

Deputies had raided the Swedish massage parlor on Jan. 10. Two employees were arrested on suspicion of prostitution that night, but charges were never filed against them. In a sting operation, 15 men were cited for soliciting prostitution.

"There may have been some truth in what (the deputies) said; I'm not saying those people didn't solicit (the undercover deputies)," Knight said. But

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authorities also raised allegations that were not true, she said.

Soquel Lomee, which was located at 2541 South Rodeo Gulch, has been closed since the raid. The property, which Knight co-owned along with Bill Grace, was sold last month.

Grace, a 74-year-old conservative political activist and longtime Santa Cruz resident, was also charged in the case. He has pleaded innocent.

After entering a plea Thursday, Knight was sentenced to serve 25 days in jail, three years probation, and 100 hours of community service. The judge allowed Knight to serve her jail term in a work-release program.

Knight, a certified massage practitioner, said she wants to continue to work in a similar field.

The judge banned Knight from opening her own massage business, but said she could work as a massage therapist for someone else.