

Pair to face brothel charges

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SANTA CRUZ — A man and woman accused of operating a house of prostitution out of a Soquel massage parlor will be formally charged with the crime in court today.

More than a half-year after authorities raided the Soquel Lomee and shut it down, property owners William Grace and Valerie A. Knight are set to appear before a judge, each to answer to a misdemeanor charge they maintained a house of prostitution.

The charge carries a minimum penalty of probation and a maximum of six months in jail.

Grace and Knight co-owned the property at 2541 South Rodeo Gulch Road, where authorities suspected the Swedish massage parlor was a front for a brothel that catered to upscale clientele.

Deputies raided the place Jan. 10, and in a sting operation, 15 men were cited for solicitation of prostitution, including a retiring San Jose police officer, a nurse, a firefighter, a lawyer, and a pharmacist. Most of the men have since pleaded guilty, prosecutors said. One man was convicted after a jury trial. One case was dismissed.

Charges were never filed against two women who were cited for prostitution the night of the raid. No witnesses came forward, and evidence was insufficient to prosecute them, said Assistant District Attorney Kate Canlis.

Prosecutors spent months reviewing the case against Knight and Grace. Charges were finally filed July 1, Canlis said, and the two were sent letters ordering them to appear in court for an arraignment today.

Canlis said there was "a substantial amount of evidence" for the charges, but she declined to go into detail.

The two were not charged with felonies, Canlis said, because it would have been difficult to prove they profited from prostitution.

Ben Rice, Grace's attorney, said Wednesday his client will enter an innocent plea.

"He has never been involved in this business, and he's not made any money on that," Rice said.

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Knight's attorney, Mitchell Page, did not return a phone call Wednesday. Earlier, Knight and Page have refused to comment about whether any prostitution had been taking place at the parlor.

In an affidavit, deputies allege the two "had full knowledge" of the illegal activities at the business.

Grace, a retired 74-year-old firefighter and local conservative political activist, and Knight, 49, both owned the property since 1983. Knight owned and operated the business.

The parlor located in a nondescript, two-story cin-

der block building in an industrial area near the end of Research Park Road, has been closed since the raid. Earlier this month, the property was sold to a software business, Rice said.

In a civil action, the District Attorney's Office obtained a temporary court order declaring the massage parlor a public nuisance under the red-light abatement law.

It was under that same law that the District Attorney's Office issued a cease-and-desist letter to Knight and Grace in 1987, warning them to stop using the business — then-called Aquarius — as a house of prostitution.