

March 9, 2001

District Attorney Joseph Waiz Jr.
Terrebonne Parish District Attorney's Office
Houma, Louisiana

MAR. 14 2001

Dear Mr. Waitz,

You are receiving this letter and information regarding the violation of code **R.S. 135 - Public Salary Deduction** of the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's office. During his time in office, Sheriff Jerry Larpenier had maintained a policy of deducting funds in an illegal manner from all Sheriff's office employees, and the resulting funding was used in an illegal manner, based on the definition of the aforementioned code. A complaint was filed with the Terrebonne's District Attorney's office. An Attorney General opinion was requested by Sheriff Larpenier, which resulted in an immediate change in the deduction policy in the Sheriff's office employee payroll. Jerry Larpenier personally handed out forms to employees, urging them to do the "right thing," and sign the new forms authorizing the payroll deduction, making the deduction legal by definition of the code. Prior to the forms being signed, the "Flower Fund" boasted a 100% participation rate. After the Attorney General opinion was handed down and the forms were disseminated, the "Flower Fund" no longer enjoyed the same 100% participation rate. This alone proved that many employees were under the distinct impression that it was in fact mandatory and did in fact "opt out" once given the opportunity. (Note: This matter has been investigated in a reportedly "ongoing" FBI investigation of the Terrebonne Sheriff's office.) However, the signed authorization forms that made the deductions legal have apparently created a false interpretation that the payroll deductions were always approved and always legal, and that the previous expenditures were also always approved, accepted, and legal. Jerry Larpenier's claim that everyone knew the deduction was voluntary for the fund is fictional. Copies of some of the incoming statements of employees requesting refunds for the unauthorized deductions from their payroll checks are attached. These forms, in effect, verify Sheriff Jerry Larpenier lied to the public and to investigators in the matter, when he stated "It's all legal." His immediate update of the policy, once it was brought to his attention in October of 1999, also shows a realization that an impropriety had in fact occurred in this matter. His method to correct the error might have also been considered as coercion, as he himself handed out some of the forms that allowed the legal deduction for the "Flower Fund" for the first time ever, and he personally watched some employees sign the forms.

Since Sheriff Larpenier personally abused the "Flower Fund," it was inappropriate for him to personally request and watch employee signatures being applied to the form, which was later used as proof that employees had always agreed and always accepted the deductions and resulting expenditures. In fact, as the attached signed statements indicates, employees had never been previously asked about the deductions or told of the uses of the fund until the day Larpenier finally handed out the appropriate forms. It is also quite possible many employees chose to sign the forms to allow the deduction for a relatively small amount, (\$1.00 per employee from every other payroll check), to avoid any risk of reprisal under highly tenuous circumstances from Sheriff Larpenier. Simply, for most, refusing or complaining about the fund was 'just not worth it' in the end. Fortunately, there are some who have not been afraid to come forward and go on record to state

the truth about abuse and improprieties in the Sheriff's office, even though they do feel concerns about possible reprisals, since the ramifications of their signed statements may include further investigation into activities of the Sheriff's office, and create a call for indictment of the sheriff for his role in illegal activities.

Enclosed you will find the statements signed by individuals who were never given an opportunity to "opt out" of the automatic deduction of their payroll checks to a grossly misused and abused fund to which Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenner seemed to have been the primary beneficiary.

We trust that you will review the enclosed information and prosecute Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenner to the fullest extent of the law.

We would also like to call to your attention two transactions in particular as can be seen on the enclosed copy of the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's office general ledger dated July 6, 1999. One is an expenditure in the amount of \$60.00 payable to "Terrebonne Sportsman League, Inc" and the other expenditure is in the amount of \$400.00 payable to "Houma Council No 1317 K of C.

We trust that you will investigate these transactions and take actions accordingly if either of the transactions are deemed illegal or unethical.

As the television commercials state, "Against your will, is against the law!"

Thank You.

cc: Federal Bureau of Investigation
Louisiana Attorney General
Louisiana Legislative Auditors
Louisiana State Ethics Board
U.S. Attorney – Eddie Jordan
Assistant U.S. Attorney Al Winters
Metropolitan Crime Commission
The Courier – Mike Slaughter
'Dateline'
'20/20'
WGNO - 26

February 1, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

I was never given an option to "opt" out of the automatic deduction of my payroll check to a grossly misused and abused fund to which you seemed to have been the primary beneficiary.

I was not told that this fund would be used to purchase gifts for you for whatever reason you deemed appropriate.

I did not sign a written authorization allowing the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office to withhold this money from my check.

I am hereby requesting a refund of all monies withheld and designated as "Flower" from my payroll check during my employment with the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office since I was not given an option to participate or not, and was under the complete impression that it was in fact mandatory.

The basis for my request can be found in R.S. 135 – Public Salary Deduction, which clearly states that Public salary deduction is committed when any public officer or public employee shall retain or divert for his own use or the use of any other person or political organization, any part of the salary or fees allowed by law to any other public officer or public employee. Whoever commits the crime of Public salary deduction shall be imprisoned for not more than five years with or without hard labor or shall be fined not more than \$5,000.00 or both.

Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,

Michael Lirette
NAME Michael Lirette

P.O. Box 375
ADDRESS
Fernwood ms 39635

February 1, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

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Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,

NAME

Todd Gagnard

ADDRESS

105 BRUNET ST.

SCHRIEVER, LA 70395

February 1, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

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Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,

Shawn T. Boudreaux
NAME Shawn T. Boudreaux

423 Righter St.
ADDRESS

Houma, La. 70364

February 1, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

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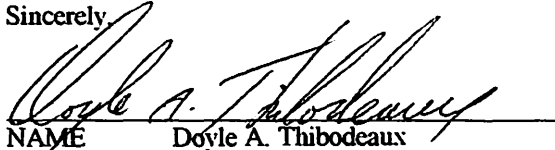
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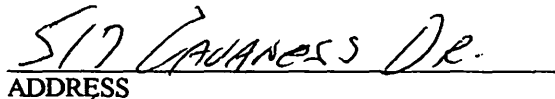
Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,

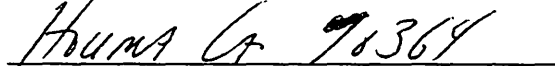


NAME

Doyle A. Thibodeaux



ADDRESS



February 1, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

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Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,


NAME Willie C. Radau III

7592 Park Ave.
ADDRESS

Houma, La. 70364

February 1, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

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Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,

STEVEN P. DOMANGUE

NAME Seven P. Domangue

6593 GRAND CAILLON RD

ADDRESS

DULAC LA 70353

February 1, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

I was never given an option to "opt" out of the automatic deduction of my payroll check to a grossly misused and abused fund to which you seemed to have been the primary beneficiary.

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Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,


NAME James Morgan

419 Oak St.
ADDRESS

Houma, La. 70363

February 6, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

I was never given an option to "opt" out of the automatic deduction of my payroll check to a grossly misused and abused fund to which you seemed to have been the primary beneficiary.

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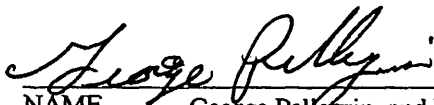
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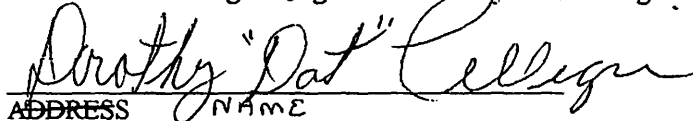
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Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,



NAME George Pellegrin and Dorothy "Dot" Pellegrin



ADDRESS NAME

145 ROVEN ST - HOUMA LA

Address

February 17, 2001

Sheriff Jerry J. Larpenter
P.O. Box 1670
Houma, LA. 70361

RE: FLOWER FUND

Sheriff Larpenter,

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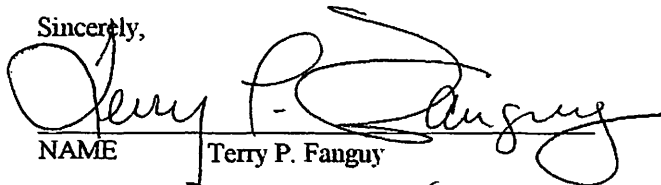
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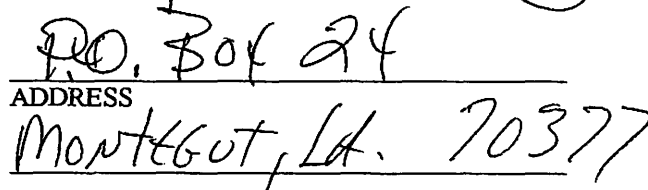
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Thank you for expediting my refund.

Sincerely,




NAME Terry P. Fanguy


ADDRESS
Montegut, LA. 70377

ACCOUNT	DATE	TRANS	CODE	BANK	DESCRIPTION	DEBITS	CREDITS	BALANCE
20-10	5/31/1999		10		OFFICE SUPPLY & EXPENSE			173,226.03
	6/30/1999	32280	90	3	TERREBONNE SPORTSMAN'S LEAGUE INC	60.00		
	6/30/1999	32283	90	3	I ROBT BOUDREAUX C OF C	1,745.00		
	6/30/1999	32284	90	3	DITAPHONE CORP	95.00		
	6/30/1999	32293	90	3	GACHASSIN INC	30.20		
	6/30/1999	32294	90	3	MOUMA COUNCIL NO 1317 K OF C	400.00		
	6/30/1999	32295	90	3	NATIONAL AUTOMOBILE DEALERS	52.00		
	6/30/1999	32296	90	3	OFFICE DEPOT	51.89		
	6/30/1999	32297	90	3	REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION CENTER	409.35		
	6/30/1999	32301	90	3	MR ROBERT WRIGHT	480.00		
	6/30/1999	32304	90	3	LOWE'S HOME CENTERS INC	582.74		
	6/30/1999	32308	90	3	LEE WHITNEY SIGNS	4,038.02		
					ACCOUNT TOTALS	27,172.40 ✓	748.58-	199,650.05 *
20-11	5/31/1999		10		COMPUTER COSTS			30,000.00
	6/02/1999	31934	90	3	T P C G	2,500.00		
					ACCOUNT TOTALS	2,500.00 ✓	.00	32,500.00 *
20-12	5/31/1999		10		ACCOUNTING & AUDITING			20,700.00
	6/02/1999	31938	90	3	MCAND, INC	600.00		
	6/18/1999	32159	90	3	BERGERON & CO	1,500.00		
					ACCOUNT TOTALS	2,100.00 ✓	.00	22,800.00 *
21-01	5/31/1999		10		ATTORNEY FEES			123,973.95
	6/30/1999	32312	90	3	WEIGAND & DODD	9,868.00		
					ACCOUNT TOTALS	9,868.00 ✓	.00	133,841.95 *
21-02	5/31/1999		10		OFFICIAL PUBLICATION			5,936.95
	6/18/1999	32156	90	3	THE COURIER	30.00		
	6/23/1999	32168	90	3	THE COURIER	48.50		
	6/30/1999	32300	90	3	THE COURIER	132.50		
					ACCOUNT TOTALS	211.00 ✓	.00	6,147.95 *
21-03	5/31/1999		10		LITIGATION			74,415.56
	6/30/1999	14	30	3	VOID CHECK #31873 DATED 5-25-99		17,500.00-	
	6/01/1999	31908	90	3	AUBREY AUTHEMENT IND/KEITH WHIPPLE	10,000.00		
	6/02/1999	31933	90	3	HENRY RILEY	587.54		
	6/09/1999	32065	90	3	JONES, WHIPPLE, MUNOZ & AURILLO	17,500.00		
	6/11/1999	32074	90	3	WEIGAND & DODD	2,962.12		
	6/11/1999	32078	90	3	JEFFREY M. BOUDREAUX	170.00		
	6/18/1999	32160	90	3	RAYMOND J. TRAHAN	500.00		
	6/18/1999	32161	90	3	NICHOLAS J. TRAHAN	250.00		
	6/18/1999	32162	90	3	DAVID S. POWELL	250.00		
	6/30/1999	32311	90	3	EDWARD J. CASTAING, JR.	1,400.00		
	6/30/1999	32313	90	3	WEIGAND & DODD	5,767.58		
					ACCOUNT TOTALS	39,387.24 ✓	17,500.00-	96,302.80 *
25-08	5/31/1999		10		ACADEMY SUPPLIES & EXPENSES			9,144.06
	6/04/1999	2	30	3	LOUISIANA LAW ENFORCEMENT ACADEMY		644.73-	
	6/02/1999	31957	90	3	RYAN'S FAMILY STEAK HOUSE	77.94		
	6/04/1999	31971	90	3	BATON ROUGE POLICE SUPPLIES	320.50		
	6/04/1999	32002	90	3	SAFETY & TRAINING CONSULTANTS	120.00		

THE COURIER
HOUMA
Serving South Louisiana's Bayou Country

Local News

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March 9, 2001

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News ▸

Flowered with gifts

By STEVEN WARD / September 19, 1999
[Email this story.](#)

The Sheriff's Office Flower Fund has provided flowers for fallen officers -and pricy presents for their bosses.

It's been a tradition at the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office for 30 years.



A tradition that has gained local sheriffs thousands of dollars worth of gifts for three decades.

The Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office Flower Fund was started in 1968 by then-Sheriff Charlton P. Rozands.

The fund was set up by Rozands so Sheriff's Office employees could donate money to buy flowers for deputies who died in the line of duty, as well as retired officers who passed away.

But according to Sheriff Jerry Larpenter the fund also was used - and still was as recently as 1998 - to buy the sheriff expensive Christmas and birthday gifts.

One dollar is automatically deducted once a month from every Sheriff's Office employee's paycheck. Rozands started off with 50 cents to be deducted, but in 1980, Sheriff Ronnie Duplantis raised the amount to \$1.

According to payroll records dated Dec. 31, 1998, each one of the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office's 300 employees - except Larpenter - had the deduction taken from his or her paycheck.

According to Larpenter, the flower fund is not mandatory for employees.

Larpenter also said the fund is legal and has never been questioned by authorities.

"Not one person has ever complained about this fund. Not one employee," Larpenter said recently.

But according to Sheriff's Office financial records, the internal fund is



Free Games!

Use your Headbone!

used to buy more than flowers and birthday and Christmas gifts.

Dating back as far as 1995, some of Larpenner's gifts - for Christmas, his birthday and National Boss Day - include hundreds of dollars worth of fishing and hunting gear, two trolling motors worth between \$400 and \$600 each, a \$258 dollar watch, a \$1,300 bed and a \$1,400 stereo system.

The flower fund money also has been used to buy watches for Sheriff's Office employees who reached 20 years of service, birthday and National Boss Day cakes, Christmas ornaments and a "small leather" Christmas gift and perfume for Larpenner's former wife.

"My employees have appreciated me as a boss over the years. Every boss gets gifts. This has been going on for 30 years, and the sheriffs before me have received the same kind of gifts," Larpenner said.

A state Attorney General's opinion requested by Larpenner last month confirmed the sheriff's claims that the flower fund is legal and permissible.

But criteria listed by the Attorney General's Office states:

- The fund must be voluntarily.
- Employees have to be "advised" about the "specific purposes" of the fund.
- The money cannot be mixed with taxpayer money.
- Participating employees must give written permission for the deductions.

Larpenner said no employee during the fund's 30 years has ever given written permission. That will change, he said - written permission will be a requirement.

And with the recent Attorney General's Office opinion, Larpenner has instituted some other changes in the flower fund, including the creation of two scholarships for the sons and daughters of his employees.

'I'M NOT STUPID'

When questioned about why he asked the state Attorney General's Office for an opinion last month, Larpenner said he knew questions would be raised about the flower fund during his upcoming run for re-election.

According to Larpenner, his lone political competitor for sheriff - former Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office Deputy Willie Radau III - went to see his chief financial officer recently and made a public records request for financial records connected to the flower fund.

"I'm not stupid. We know where all of this is coming from," Larpenner said.

When first asked by The Courier what the flower fund is, Larpenier immediately handed over the Attorney General's Office opinion and said, "It's all legal."

When asked why he wanted financial records connected to the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office Flower Fund, Radau said he has always been suspicious about the fund since 1978 - the year he entered the Sheriff's Office as an employee.

"For many years, employees were never made aware of how the money was spent specifically. They said it was for flowers, but not gifts for the sheriff," Radau said.

"I think it's inappropriate when the sheriff is the recipient of most of the money and he's the only one not donating," Radau said.

Larpenier said he thought \$1 a month was being taken out of his paycheck when he became sheriff because it was taken out for years as an employee before he became Terrebonne's top cop.

Larpenier's chief financial officer, Maj. Sele Roddy, recently told Larpenier that the \$1 donation has historically never been deducted from the sheriff's paychecks. After learning this last week, Larpenier told Roddy to start deducting the dollar from his paychecks.

Radau said he thinks current employees are scared of losing their jobs and that's why no one has ever questioned the flower fund.

When told about the recent Attorney General's Office opinion declaring the fund's legality, Radau said, "maybe it's legal, but if anything it's unethical."

THE GIFTS

The price tag for some of the gifts purchased with flower fund money have neared or topped the \$1,000 mark.

In December 1995, Larpenier received a stereo system from Rex Television and Appliance Centers that cost \$1,462.41. The money used to pay for the stereo came from the flower fund and was designated in financial records as "Sheriff's Christmas Gift."

In March of this year, a check for \$1,000 was written from the flower fund and applied to Larpenier's account at Heilig-Meyers Furniture store.

"They bought me a bed, because that's what I needed," Larpenier said. The sheriff said the gift was a late 1998 Christmas gift.

Larpenier paid the \$297.86 difference in the total cost of the bed.

On Oct. 19, 1998, \$978.53 of flower fund money was spent at Dagate's Marine for a trolling motor, two batteries, a twist lock plug, a handle and a receptacle and cover. According to financial records, the check written to Dagate's Marine has a notation under it: "Sheriff Larpenier's

Boss Day and Birthday Gift."

Larpenter's birthday is Oct. 26. National Boss Day also is in October.

Other gifts haven't been as extravagant:

- On Oct. 14, 1998, a \$51.80 cake from B&D Bakery was purchased with flower fund money. According to financial records, the item was designated as a "Bosses Day Cake."

"I don't even eat cake," Larpenter said. "That's for my employees."

- Flower fund money also was used to purchase \$183 worth of "building materials" at Lowe's on Dec. 9, 1997. Records indicate the money was spent for "JJL Christmas Present." Larpenter said he does not remember what his 1997 Christmas present was.

- In July of last year, flower fund money was used to purchase \$251 worth of fishing gear at Songy's Sporting Goods and \$380 worth of fishing equipment at Wal-Mart. Financial records do not mention Larpenter, Christmas or the sheriff's birthday. The records only show a citation of "gift."

Larpenter said the all of the fishing equipment - including a rod, reel and various tackle - was for him. Even though the equipment was purchased in July, Larpenter said the gifts were probably a late birthday gift or Christmas gift from 1997 or early birthday gift in 1998.

"Sometimes, I don't decide what I want until later," Larpenter said.

- On Dec. 3, 1997, Larpenter's then-wife Darla received a \$44 "leather item" from Dillard's that was purchased with flower fund money. The Larpeners have since divorced.

"It was a gift for my wife they gave her at the Christmas party," Larpenter said. The item was purchased by Sheriff's Office bookkeeper Hope Brunet. She was reimbursed by money from the flower fund. More than \$310 of flower fund money also was used that year for the agency's Christmas party.

- On Oct. 22, 1997, \$186 worth of hunting gear - including shirts and jeans - were purchased at Wal-Mart with flower fund money.
- Also in October 1997, flower fund money was used to buy two cakes - one for \$41 and one for \$35. According to financial records, one cake was for Larpenter's birthday and one was for National Boss Day.
- In August 1997, Larry "Zip" Robichaux, the Sheriff's Office purchasing agent, bought \$220 worth of fishing equipment at Songy's Sporting Goods. According to financial records, Robichaux received a check for the same amount from the flower fund. Records cite the expenditure as a "Boss Day Gift."
- In December 1996, flower fund money was used to buy a \$60 bottle of perfume at Dillard's. There is no record of who the perfume was for,

but Larpenter said it was a Christmas gift for his then-wife.

- The same month and year, a \$258 men's watch was purchased from Weyl's Jewelry Store with flower fund money, according to financial records. There was no record of who received the watch, but Larpenter said it was his 1996 Christmas present from his employees.
- In October 1996, flower fund money was used to buy a \$400 trolling motor at Dagate's Marine. Financial records show the "gift" was for Larpenter's "Bosses Day and Birthday."

Flower fund money also was used on others.

In July 1998, nine watches from the Louisiana Sheriff's Association - worth \$65 each - were purchased for Sheriff's Office employees for \$585. Larpenter said the watches were for employees who hit the 20-year mark.

Those employees were: Roddy, Marie Cullever, Bonnie Duplantis, Cheryl Allemand, Godfrey Buquet, Mike Elstner, Ronnie Bergeron, Craig Boudreaux, Mike Solet, Calvin Jackson and Randy Pijor.

Two more Louisiana Sheriff's Association watches were purchased for employees in March 1999, according to Sheriff's Office financial records.

The flower fund is also used for flowers.

According to financial records, \$110 worth of flowers from Bayou Florist & Gift Shop were purchased last October for Deputy Milton Theriot's funeral. Theriot died in the line of duty last year while chasing a suspect he was trying to arrest.

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OPINION

In an Aug. 9, 1999, letter to Louisiana Attorney General Richard Ieyoub, Larpenter asked the office for an opinion because "there seems to be some questions being raised about the legality of the fund."

In the letter, Larpenter writes that the fund is used to "send flowers or to pay for masses in connection with the death of deputies who were hospitalized for health problems." The letter goes on to say that "proceeds from the fund were also used to purchase the Sheriff a Christmas present from the employees and a present for the Sheriff on his birthday."

Larpenter outlined in the letter that the fund was not mandatory.

In an Aug. 31, 1999, response to Larpenter's letter, Assistant Attorney General Robert Harroun III wrote that because the donations are voluntary and the employees are specifically told what the money is used for, the fund is "permissible."

When contacted by The Courier, Harroun said that his written opinion was created in response to Larpenter's request, not after any kind of investigation.

"Just because they have not received written permission in 30 years does not mean it was illegal. I can't say that. That would be left up to legislative auditors," Harroun said. "We just gave him some guidelines if he wanted to continue to have the fund. Those four criteria is a recommendation of protection for having the fund."

Larpenster said the flower fund has been scrutinized by independent and legislative auditors over the years and there have never been questions or allegations from auditors about the fund's legality.

Still, Larpenster admitted that his office has never obtained written permission for the deductions. He said he did not realize he needed written permission because there have never been any questions or complaints about the fund until now.

"It was always something we told them about, asked if they wanted to participate, and they said yes or no," Larpenster said.

But since the opinion was released, Larpenster said he would make sure employees give written permission for the deductions from now on.

On Sept. 2, Larpenster sent out a memorandum to all of his employees explaining the flower fund and where the money goes. At the bottom of the memo, there is place for employees to sign and date the document indicating whether they want to participate in the fund.

At the same time the memo was issued, there was a page placed in the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures manual outlining the details of the flower fund.

It's the first time in 30 years there has ever been any written internal information about the flower fund.

Both the memo and the new "policy" also mention Larpenster's most recent flower fund expenditure - two \$500 college scholarships for employees' children. The scholarships honor Theriot, the deputy who drowned.

"From now on, the money will not be used for Christmas or birthday gifts for me. The money is now for two scholarships in the name of Deputy Milton Theriot," Larpenster said.

The recipients of the two scholarships will have to be local seniors planning to attend college in Louisiana. The winners also will have to be the children of Sheriff's Office employees.

The first scholarship will be awarded sometime during early 2000.

LEGAL FUND

Larpenster maintains many things while asserting the legality of the flower fund.

According to Larpenster, the fund has never been questioned by employees or legislative auditors in 30 years. He also states that the

fund has always been voluntary.

There are 300 employees at the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office. Since sheriffs have never contributed, that's \$299 a month for 12 months.

The flower fund brings in \$3,588 a year. Larpenster said that, historically, the sheriff's birthday and Christmas gifts usually cost between \$1,000 and \$1,500.

The decisions on presents and how much should be spent each year is left up to a flower fund committee. The committee is made up of Roddy, Brunet and Larpenster's chief bookkeeper, Duplantis.

That would leave \$2,088 for flowers, employee watches and other various expenditures for the flower fund.

Although flower fund money will no longer be used to buy Larpenster anything for Christmas or his birthday, he said it does not mean his employees won't "put in" themselves to buy him a gift.

Larpenster has employees who make as little as \$19,000, but he said none of them has ever complained about the flower-fund deduction. Larpenster's base salary is \$75,000 a year.

"I have never had one complaint from any employee. If they want to show their appreciation to me as a boss and get me a present, I think that's OK," Larpenster said.

Steven Ward is a staff writer at The Courier. He can be reached at 850-1148 or by e-mail at hdcnews@nytimes.com.

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Bad smell wafted from 'Flower' Fund

The issue: *The Sheriff's Office "flower" fund.*

We suggest: *It's former use to buy gifts for the sheriff was inappropriate.*

Sept. 26, 1999

It may be "legal," but a bad smell wafts from the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office Flower Fund.

The good news is that corrective action has been taken. But this occurred only after outside attention was called to the 31-year-old fund.

It appears that some critical legal requirements for the flower fund were not met until this month. The Sheriff's Office may not have known about those requirements until obtaining an opinion from the state Attorney General's Office late last month. But the point is that local officials should have found this out long, long ago.

The Sheriff's Office requested the AG's opinion in an Aug. 9 letter after Willie Radau III, a candidate for sheriff in this year's election, made a public records request for information about the flower fund.

As it turns out, in recent years the \$1 a month deducted from Sheriff's Office employees' checks for the flower fund was used mostly to buy gifts for the sheriff. Those gifts included a \$1,400 stereo system, \$2,000 in hunting and fishing gear, \$1,000 toward a bed, \$183 in building supplies and a \$258 watch.

The fund did pay \$110 for flowers for the funeral of Deputy Milton Theriot, who died in the line of duty last October. It also paid for watches at \$65 each for employees who reached 20 years of service - 11 did so last year and this year.

All of the 299 employees under the sheriff participate, generating \$3,588 a year. The sheriff, whose base salary is \$75,000 a year, said that he has never had an employee object to or question the voluntary flower fund deduction or how it was spent.

However, it's a little difficult to expect an employee, who serves at the sheriff's discretion, to criticize the fund. And it does not appear that rank and file employees had any information about how the "flower" fund money was spent.

The fund's monies were private, it is significant to note. However, it is significant, too, to note that it took taxpayer-supported Sheriff's Office resources and personnel to administer the flower fund.

It seems inconsistent on the sheriff's part to have promoted passage of a local tax increase to go for higher salaries for deputies while the flower fund was getting \$3,000 a year of deputies' money that went principally to buy the sheriff luxurious gifts.

And 100 percent participation in this voluntary charitable fund is very unusual. We're certain that local United Way officials and others are quite envious of such a high level of voluntary participation.

All that said, give Sheriff Larpenter credit for changing the policies of the flower fund once the perceptions that it created and the legal requirements for its existence became known. The fund no longer will be used to buy gifts for the sheriff; two \$500 annual scholarships for children of sheriff's employees have been created in the name of Deputy Theriot. A Sept. 2 memo to all employees explained the policies regarding the fund and sought the necessary written approval for participation.

Larpenter did not create the flower fund. It preceded his tenure and likely that of most now with the Sheriff's Office. It is the only system they have known - until now.

The change he has made is for the better, unquestionably. Better for the sheriff. Better for the public. It is regrettable that it took over 30 years for this change to come about.

Editorials represent the opinion of The Courier and not of any one individual. Questions or comments concerning editorials may be addressed to the Editor, P.O. Box 2717, Houma, LA, 70361 or e-mail at: hdcnews@nytimes.com.



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March 9, 2001

FBI launches inquiry into Terrebonne Sheriff's Office

STEVEN WARD
November 19, 1999
[Email this story.](#)

The FBI is investigating the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office over allegations of questionable financial dealings, including the parish agency's "Flower Fund" and motor pool lease, according to a bureau spokeswoman and Sheriff Jerry Larpenrter.

Kriss Fortunato, spokeswoman for the FBI in New Orleans, confirmed Thursday that the bureau has launched an investigation into Larpenrter's office and that federal subpoenas were issued to the agency.

Fortunato said she could not comment further on the investigation or reveal who specifically was subpoenaed. U.S. Attorney Eddie Jordan of New Orleans, whose office issues federal subpoenas, said Thursday that he couldn't comment about a possible investigation until there is an arrest or indictment.

Subpoenas are written legal orders directing a person to appear in court or show specified documents. Subpoenas do not indicate any kind of innocence or guilt in a legal matter.

Larpenrter acknowledged the investigation and said Thursday that he knows it stems from his former political opponent, Willie Radau III. Larpenrter said federal investigators have requested the same Sheriff's Office records Radau obtained during the election and tried to use against the sheriff.

"I've got nothing to hide. I welcome an investigation because it's going to prove there has been no wrongdoing whatsoever here," Larpenrter said.

"This is all politics. This is all about the election. There were many lies and mistruths put out by my opponent, including ads about the motor pool, the flower fund. There's no doubt in my mind," Larpenrter said when asked who was behind the allegations.

Larpenrter said he was not personally served with any subpoenas, but federal subpoenas were issued to a pair of his employees last week. The sheriff would not disclose who was personally served. Larpenrter said the subpoenas are requests for certain records from his office.

Radau, who lost the Oct. 23 primary election in a landslide, has since returned to his job with the Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office.



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When contacted about the FBI's investigation, Radau said he is a federal witness and under subpoena, too. He said that by law he is not allowed to comment.

Larpenter did not want to discuss the investigation in detail. But the sheriff said that his understanding is that federal investigators are interested in records about the Sheriff's Office's "Flower Fund" and Larpenter's motor pool lease with Melton M. Barrett.

Bill Dodd, attorney for the Sheriff's Office, did not return a Courier telephone call seeking comment.

Radau published advertisements in The Courier during the election, accusing Larpenter of a "sweet good ole boy deal" with Barrett and making various allegations about the motor pool lease, including that Larpenter has leased the motor pool from Barrett for 13 years at a cost of \$380,000. At the time, Radau submitted public records to The Courier backing up his claims.

Radau's advertisement also states that Barrett made about \$379,000 for storage fees and \$104,850 in wrecker fees of seized vehicles kept at the motor pool.

Radau's advertisement also states that Larpenter entered into a four-year lease agreement with Barrett in June 1996 to lease the motor pool at a rate of \$2,500 a month. In the agreement, Radau charged, Larpenter allows Barrett to continue to occupy a portion of the property, which is paid for by taxpayers.

Two years before the expiration of the 1996 lease, the ad claims, Larpenter entered into a new lease with Barrett, and the monthly payment went from \$2,500 to \$2,800.

Radau's advertisement also states that between Aug. 27, 1998, and Oct. 4, 1999, 130 vehicles were seized by wreckers in the parish. Barrett was paid \$9,400 in wrecker fees to handle 129 of those seizures. The only other wrecker used was Bill's Towing "at a charge of zero," according to the advertisement.

At the bottom of the advertisement, it reads, "Is this legal?"

Barrett could not be reached for comment.

The "Flower Fund" was another campaign issue Radau raised during the sheriff's race, saying it was an example of unethical behavior by Larpenter.

The fund originated in 1968 under then-Sheriff Charlton Rozands. It was set up to buy flowers for fallen officers and retired officers who died. But public records from last year reveal that the Sheriff's Office also used the money for expensive Christmas and birthday gifts for Larpenter, Christmas gifts for the sheriff's wife and watches for employees who hit 20 years of service.

Once a month, \$1 was deducted from the paychecks of each of Larpenter's 299 employees. That money was designated to go to the

fund. Larpenter was not having money deducted.

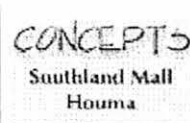
Larpenter said the donations were voluntary and legal, according to a state Attorney General's Office opinion Larpenter requested in the middle of the campaign.

Larpenter's gifts usually cost between \$1,000 and \$1,500. When a story about the fund was published in The Courier, Larpenter decided to start having the \$1 deducted from his paycheck. He also asked the agency to stop buying him presents and to use the money for a college fund for the children of Sheriff's Office employees.

Larpenter said Thursday that he is looking forward to the FBI finishing its investigation.

"I have never lied to anyone, the public or the media, and I never will," Larpenter said. "I have no problems with this investigation and look forward to it concluding. There are no underground deals here. The investigation will prove that these are just allegations. We need to put this behind us."

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Editorials

Sheriff's Office needs higher ethics code

The issue: *The investigation of the Sheriff's Office.*

We suggest: *The sheriff should review all policies.*

December 2, 1999

The FBI is investigating the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office and some allegations of questionable financial dealings at the agency.

Earlier this month, federal agents served the agency with subpoenas. Investigators want documents dealing with the Sheriff's Office "Flower Fund" and motor pool lease. Sheriff Jerry Larperter says the investigation is just political and that it stems from a nasty campaign with his former head training officer Willie Radau III.

Larperter says Radau spread "many lies and mistruths" about him.

However, once candidate Radau began to look into the details of how the Sheriff's Office Flower Fund worked, Larperter quickly crawfished. The Flower Fund at its inception under then-Sheriff Charlton Rozands was a noble idea. Money was collected from each Sheriff's Office employee's check and put toward buying flowers for current or retired deputies who died.

But somewhere along the way, the Flower Fund took a bad turn. It became nothing more than a slush fund for gifts - many of which went to Larperter for Christmases and birthdays during his tenure as sheriff.

Confronted with this fact, Larperter decided to stop accepting those gifts and instead use that money for scholarships for the children of Sheriff's Office employees.

Part of his justification was that the Flower Fund was created by Rozands and that no one had complained about it for 30 years.

What Larperter failed to mention was that he has been sheriff for almost half that time. There are no sacred cows. Just because Rozands started it didn't mean Larperter couldn't have ended the misuse years ago.

During the campaign, Radau also said the Sheriff's Office has spent \$380,000 in taxpayer money to lease motor pool space. He said that the Sheriff's Office also allows the property's owner, Melton Barrett, to continue to use part of the space. Radau called the arrangement a "sweet good ole boy deal" for a Larperter friend.



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Larpernter won't discuss the motor pool any further, since the FBI is involved.

Whether anything illegal is involved is up to the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Orleans. And knowing U.S. Attorney Eddie Jordan's fervor for pursuing politicians, if there's something there, his investigators will find it.

No matter what the federal investigation uncovers, Larpernter must immediately order a full review of all his office's policies and procedures. The public, which easily re-elected him in September, deserves to know that the Sheriff's Office is conducting not just legal business, but ethical business, too.

Larpernter can't hide behind charges of politics. Regardless of his motivation, Radau was right about the Flower Fund. It stunk.

Now Larpernter must fulfill the public's trust in him and assure the taxpayers that no other archaic policies ripe for misuse remain in place. The Sheriff's Office has a moral obligation to not only live by the law, but to live by an even higher standard.

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