

## Craigslist crimes bring area scrutiny to 'erotic services' on Palouse

Moscow, Pullman officials say they're aware of postings

By David Johnson of the Tribune  
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MOSCOW - "Hello Gentlemen. Due to the recent issues with CI (Craigslist), I have had to change my contact procedure. My name is Alexxxis."

This recent Craigslist entry was made shortly after a Boston University medical student allegedly answered such ads for "erotic" services by going to hotel rooms with the intent of robbing the women. Philip Markoff, 22, (dubbed by the media as the Craigslist Killer) is now charged with murdering one woman and kidnapping another.

"I do not have any cash in my room at any time," Alexxxis wrote. "I have security that watches over me. ID and references may be required, for my safety."

Curiously enough, Alexxxis isn't soliciting from Boston or any other big city. She describes herself on Craigslist as "Sultry, Seductive Alexxxis, storming into Pullman/Moscow."

Authorities here confirmed that Alexxxis is one of several purported women advertising their "erotic services" on the Palouse via Craigslist.

"Every man's fantasy," reads another entry, supposedly from a woman who calls herself "Wild One" and offers the "ultimate experience."

Moscow Assistant Police Chief David Duke and Pullman Police Commander Chris Tennant confirmed that their departments are fully aware of the local Craigslist entries and that prostitution, at some minimal level, may be behind the entries. But so far, said the two, neither department has taken any active action.

"We talked to the prosecutor about setting up some kind of stings on it," Duke said, "but currently we haven't proceeded with it."

"To be honest with you," added Tennant, "we live in a university town and most people give it away for free. There isn't a market."

Even the people making the erotic entries on Craigslist attempt to play down suggestions of sex for money. "This is not an offer of prostitution," Alexxxis wrote. "I provide companionship for my time - anything that may occur beyond that is the result of an agreement between two consenting adults."

Tennant said he doubts whether such disclaimers would help circumvent laws against prostitution.

The "erotic" offerings are part of the "services" section on Craigslist. The online classified ad Web site also has a "personals" section where entries appear geared more toward seeking friendships and relationships, with little or no mention of money.

"We haven't identified any local people," Duke said of the entries that at least border on prostitution. "The ones we identified were mostly from the Spokane area that were coming to Moscow."

Tennant said small-town police departments are generally too busy with more imminent enforcement calls to investigate possible prostitution. "Traditionally, it hasn't been a problem," he said. "We get one or two prostitution-type complaints a year. It certainly isn't enough to commit resources to unless we have a complaint."

Lewiston Tribune attempts to contact a Craigslist spokesman failed. But the arrest of Markoff has again raised the question of whether the Web site should do away with its "erotic services" section.

Jim Buckmaster, chief executive officer of Craigslist, was recently quoted in a Computerworld magazine article that the category was added at the request of users who wanted such entries under a single category with a warning screen. "It's intended only for legal businesses to post," Buckmaster was quoted as saying, "and anything illegal is not wanted there and is removed by staff."

Many of the erotic entries include nude photographs that are placed amid the text and easily viewed. Craigslist provides a warning that those entering the category must be 18 or older, but there's nothing preventing a younger person from simply clicking into the advertisements.

The Web site provides safety tips for first-time meetings that include, among other things, meeting in a public place, telling friends or family about the meeting, taking a cell phone, considering bringing a friend along, and trusting instincts.

"The Craigslist killer just goes to show you that the buyer beware," Tennant said. "Be careful who you're dealing with."

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