

100 MOMENTS

STING OPERATION

By Craig Mackaman (1989-2004)

Over the years, DCI agents, as well as other DPS officers, have from time-to-time gotten creative in efforts to combat felony-level criminal activity. They have organized, in cooperation with local law enforcement, what are known as “sting” operations. This is where undercover officers act like they are in the business of buying such items as stolen property, stolen vehicles, illegal drugs, and firearms. These operations attempt to target criminals and their ongoing illegal activities that negatively impact a community or area of our state. The sting is usually set up as a legitimate-looking business or storefront. However, no legitimate customers are ever encouraged to stop by.

Officers involved in the sting set up a complete turn-key operation with everything needed to run a business, including signs on the door and building. After getting set up in hopefully the right location, it’s time to get the word out. This can be done in a variety of ways from visiting local establishments where the right clientele hang out to striking up conversations at high traffic convenience stores to even spending a few hours in jail – all with a business card in hand and a line of trying to turn a buck for the boss.

Select confidential informants can also be used to introduce criminals with something to sell to the boss. Once a few transactions start taking

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place, the word starts to spread and pretty soon criminals are knocking on the door to sell drugs, guns, the “take” from last night’s break-in, or that stolen vehicle.

The deal rooms inside these storefront businesses are where most of the action takes place. Of course, there are plenty of props: cartons of cigarettes, cases of liquor and other distractions to help give the undercover the edge when it comes to making the deal for whatever the “bad guy” is selling. This, of course, is all caught on video and audio for later presentation in court, if needed.

However, most perps caught in the sting plead guilty and rarely go to court.

Winter’s Auto Recovery and Midwest Salvage and Transport were examples of two successful sting operations that DCI personnel were involved within the early 2000s in the Des Moines area. Both operations, along with other operations across the years and across the state like the System Maintenance operation in Cedar Rapids, recovered numerous stolen vehicles and stolen property, in addition to purchasing a substantial amount of illegal drugs and even a few firearms which always proved to be a hot commodity among criminal elements who weren’t normally too anxious to part with any weapons they possessed.

Both operations netted numerous arrests and following local press releases placed many within the criminal element in the community on edge.

CRAIG MACKAMAN – 2021

Now part of the Division of Intelligence, Mac spent his first 14 years with DPS with the DCI. He spent his DCI time the Gaming, Field Operations, and Intelligence Bureaus.