



Hannibal man pleads guilty in FBI sting



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An Oswego County businessman who thought he had arranged for a sexual tryst with an underage girl in Costa Rica found himself snared in an FBI sting as he tried to leave a Miami airport, federal agents said.

Roger C. Shutts Jr., 57, of Hannibal, was arrested July 26 and had been awaiting trial in a federal court in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

But the day after a federal jury convicted another man in a nearly identical case, Shutts pleaded guilty to attempting to travel to Costa Rica for sex with a 14- or 15-year-old prostitute, his lawyer said.

"There was no girl. It was a sting operation set up by the government," said defense lawyer **Marc David Seitles**, of Miami. "They placed an advertisement in an adult magazine soliciting men to travel to Costa Rica or Mexico. They would provide the men with escorts, never mentioning the age of the escort."

Shutts saw the "Latin American Pleasure Tours" ad in Xtreme Magazine, a guide for adult entertainment in the Northeast, **Seitles** said. The advertisement read: "An all inclusive travel service where all personal desires are fulfilled."

Customers could choose to travel to Mexico or Costa Rica, and pay one price for their round trip airfare, hotel accommodations and a companion.

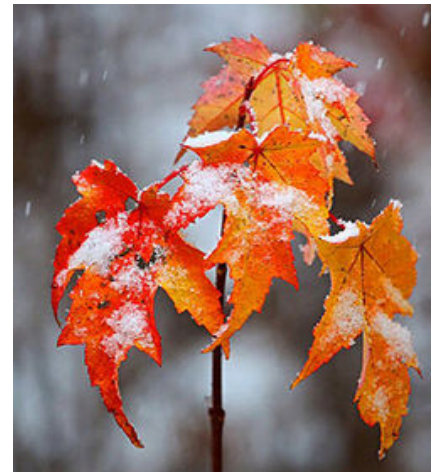
"It looks like it's a legitimate business, and there's nothing to indicate it has anything to do with children or minors," **Seitles** said.

But when an agent asked Shutts what type of girl he was looking for, he said, "A younger girl and an older girl."

The agent responded, "How about 14 or 15?"

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"He said, 'Yeah,' and that's his crime," Seitles said. "There was no chatting on his computer. He never actually spoke to an underage girl, he never saw a picture of an underage girl and he never met an underage girl. But the age of the escort was brought up by the agent before he paid for the service."

Shutts and the agent talked about how Shutts would either select a 14- or 15-year-old, or a 26- or 27-year-old when he arrived in Costa Rica, his lawyer said.

"The government was arguing that he was going to select the 14- or 15-year-old girl," Seitles said. "There was no child porn from his person, luggage or his home in Hannibal. He's being prosecuted for what he said, not what he did."

An affidavit filed by FBI special agent Amanda Coder says Shutts requested that a "minor female" be delivered to him at the El Presidente Hotel in San Jose, Costa Rica, between July 26 and July 31.

"After several recorded conversations between Shutts and the undercover law enforcement, Shutts paid \$600 for 12 hours of sexual services with a minor escort and an adult escort," according to the affidavit. "This payment was sent through the U.S. Postal Service in an Express Mail envelope to the undercover company's post office box located in Fort Lauderdale, Fla."

An undercover agent called Shutts and said his payment had been received. Then on July 26, Shutts flew from Rochester, NY to Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, and then to Miami International Airport.

Shutts, owner of Shutts Lumber on state Route 104 in Hannibal, was scheduled to go on trial March 25.

But after a jury convicted Jorge Muentes, who also responded to the FBI's phony advertisement in Xtreme Magazine and requested a 14- to 16-year-old prostitute from the same agent, Shutts decided not to go to trial. Muentes, who had no prior criminal record, is now facing a mandatory sentence of at least 10 years in prison.

"The risk was simply too high," Seitles said.

Shutts, who also has no prior criminal history, pleaded guilty March 20 to knowingly attempting to travel in foreign commerce for the purpose of engaging in illicit sexual conduct with another person that is a commercial sex act with a person under 18 years of age.

Alicia Valle, special counsel to the U.S. Attorney, said her office could not comment on the case because Shutts' sentencing is pending.

The government has agreed to recommend a 16-month prison sentence, but the sentence will ultimately be decided by the judge, Valle said.

Shutts, who is currently free on \$75,000 bond, also will have to register as a sex offender wherever he lives. Right now, he's living in north Florida, Seitles said.

Sentencing is set for May 30.



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