

# A rare glimpse into secret world

*Undercover police work put under the spotlight*

By Mike McIntyre

A court affidavit yesterday gave a rare glimpse into the world of undercover police officers, who are often one slip away from being exposed in dangerous situations.

For example, the officers who work in undercover stings in Manitoba are part of a select group of specially trained "pool operators" who always use their real names to avoid confusion or being exposed if they run into someone they know while working undercover.

The affidavit also identifies several examples where publicity on sting operations put officers in danger.

It is that perceived peril that brought the RCMP to court yesterday in a bid to keep secret the identities of more than a dozen officers who participated in a memorable Manitoba sting operation.

RCMP successfully obtained a one-year extension on a publication ban that was set to expire July 1 and prohibits the names of the secret agents used to bring down Michael Bridges from being broadcast or published.

There was no opposition to the police motion.

Bridges, 25, was convicted last summer of first-degree murder for the April 2002 killing of his ex-girlfriend, Erin Chorney. The 18-year-old Brandon resident was strangled with a hair dryer cord, drowned in a bathtub and then buried in someone else's grave where she remained for nearly two years.

**Bridges, 25, was convicted last summer of first-degree murder for the April 2002 killing of his ex-girlfriend, Erin Chorney**

The deadly secret was finally exposed after Bridges was lured into a five-month Hollywood-style sting operation in which he thought he was working his way up the ladder of a powerful criminal organization. The ruse involved a trip to Calgary to see a Flames hockey game, mysterious parcel deliveries in the night, a staged beating of a female agent



Now-convicted killer Michael Bridges, facing hidden camera, at the moment he realizes he has been stung.

and even a doctored videotape at a Winnipeg casino to provide an apparent murder alibi for a fellow gang member.

Bridges eventually confessed to his crime and led police straight to Chorney's body in February 2004. He is now appealing his conviction on the grounds he was tricked into making an exaggerated confession. No date has been set.

Queen's Bench Justice John Menzies had imposed a year-long publication ban on the officers' names when the trial began last June.

Police were concerned news coverage of the upcoming appeal — along with a book on the case which is going to be released this October — could put future sting operations at risk if the names of officers involved were made public.

The most recent occurred earlier this

year as CTV television in Winnipeg and W-5 were both airing documentaries on the Chorney case.

At the time, RCMP were in the midst of an undercover murder investigation targeting a Virden man for a cold case killing from British Columbia. Many of the same officers from the Chorney case were involved, according to the affidavit.

RCMP Sgt. Pat Irving says police "had to implement measures in order to lessen the risk of the target viewing the documentaries", which included flying the man out of Manitoba.

Each time there is significant media attention to this undercover technique, investigations are delayed, for fear of fall-out, jeopardizing the integrity of the investigation, and safety of the undercover operators," he said.

Albert Le Blanc, 42, was eventually arrested in early May and charged with second-degree murder. Two other suspects from B.C. have also been charged.

The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 2001 that police could no longer shield specific details of their undercover stings from the public. RCMP claimed they used the same basic "Crime Boss" scenario in most cases, but the country's highest court said allowing them to be conducted in secrecy compromises public confidence in the justice system.

The Supreme Court also ruled the identities of officers should only be protected for limited periods of time and where police can show specific examples that officer safety could be jeopardized.

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## Going undercover

Other examples include:

■ In 1994, RCMP say they had to pull the plug on an undercover sting when they learned through wiretapped phone conversations the two targets were planning to kill the secret agent. According to police, the pair claimed they'd learned through the "outlaw biker clique" that the agent was in fact a police officer. The man and his family had to be relocated for safety after police learned of specific plans to set the man up and have him killed.

■ In 1996, a five-month sting concerning the kidnapping and killing of a Vancouver woman was terminated when the target — who had initially indicated some involvement in the woman's death — suddenly stopped talking. Police believed he became aware of intense media coverage at the time concerning a high-profile case before the courts in which an undercover scenario was used. They later interviewed the target who told police he knew he was being set up.

■ In 2003, the target of another B.C. operation "went cold" around the same time media outlets were once again broadcasting details of the successful prior sting. Just as the man was getting ready for his big meeting with the "boss", he announced he wanted to quit. He later admitted to being influenced by the coverage of the earlier case.

■ In Alberta, undercover officers intercepted a target and his wife discussing a successful sting operation used in another case and questioning whether their new "friends" were playing the same game. Eventually, the target stopped following directions and the entire operation had to be terminated.

# Strike could force women, kids out of shelter

By David Kuxhaus

A strike could force women and children out of the province's largest shelter for victims of domestic violence.

"We came here for respite...and this is just causing more panic on our part," said a distraught Terrice Roemer.

Roemer, 47, came to Osborne House last month because of an abusive relationship. This week, however, she and others at the shelter learned that workers could go on strike this Friday.

"It really puts us in a very bad situation," said Roemer. "Everybody's worried."

Officials at the shelter emphasized yesterday that a contingency plan is in

place if workers walk off the job.

"Nobody is going to be put out on the street," said Barbara Judt vice-chair of the Osborne House board. "We will continue to provide services to women and children that need them."

Employees at the shelter are represented by two unions. The Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 2348 represents 47 front line workers which include, counsellors, child-care workers, cleaners and reception. CUPE national representative Mark Kernaghan said they are looking for a wage increase of approximately 40 per cent. He said that would put them on par with workers doing similar jobs with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

The remaining employees, three

supervisors and eight full-time and casual administration staff, are members of the Manitoba Government and General Employees Union Local 160.

Brenda Hasiuk, a spokeswoman with the MGEU, said wages are also the main sticking point with their members who've been without a contract since June of last year. CUPE's contract expired in April of 2005.

Roemer said she and the other women at the shelter have been told that they will be sent to other shelters if there is a strike.

"What if they're full, then what?" said Roemer. "We need to know for sure what's going to be happening with us. We're already in a state of crisis and this is just compounding the situation."

Roemer added that she made arrangements to rent an apartment prior to learning about the labour dispute but can't get in until July 1.

Judt said she can understand the level of anxiety felt by the women. She reiterated that they will all be looked after but said for security reasons she couldn't go into details about their plan. In the meantime, Judt said negotiations between the board and the two unions are ongoing and said she is hopeful a strike can be averted.

Judt would not say how many women and children are at the shelter, again citing safety concerns. Union reps estimated the number at about 40.

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Terrice Roemer says the prospect of a strike is 'just causing more panic.'



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