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## Middletown Loses Childrens Science Center

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## Middletown Loses Children's Science Center Due to Inaction Against Brothel

Melanie Shapiro, co-founder of Citizens Against Trafficking, interviewed the owners of a family-oriented business about the impact of a brothel next door.

After years of problems and the inability of the police to do anything about the brothel next door, POW Science is relocating to another part of the state.

Eric and Hema Bulmer opened POW Science, a center for children's science education at 1341 West Main Street in Middletown in 2003. They occupy a corner of the brick strip mall owned by Kevin and Vicky Tarsagian of Newport Properties. Behind their store on the opposite side of the building, Lee Health Tuina Center, an Asian spa-brothel, is their next-door neighbor.

In 2005, the brothel, opened and tried to pose as a legitimate business. At the time, a short, red-haired, stocky Chinese woman in her fifties introduced herself to the Bulmers as "Mary," the owner of Lee Health Tuina Center. "Mary" told them she had a child in China she was trying to support. They also met "David," an Asian man "Mary" introduced as her husband. He spoke no English and disappeared within a year. The Bulmers also came to know "Mary's" lawyer, an Asian-American man who spoke perfect English. "Mary" does not live at the brothel, but arrives chauffeured by a Caucasian man. "Mary" told the Bulmers that she had a business in Boston but "something bad happened."

Within months after opening, the Bulmers realized Lee Health Tuina Center was a brothel. It was always open from early in the morning until late at night. Their suspicions increased when their mother's friend was refused treatment for a back spasm. First, the woman rang the doorbell and was told she needed to pay in cash. When she returned with \$60 in cash, she was told to come back in one hour. She gave up and did not return.

The customers of Lee Health Tuina Center are all men. The men try to enter the brothel inconspicuously. Eric calls them "cowardly" and says that they hide behind a wall if the door to the brothel is not opened immediately. They peek around the wall to make sure no one can see them before entering the brothel. Men used to park behind the wall between the brothel and POW Science until the Bulmers confronted the men and refused to let them park there or in front of their store. Sunday is the busiest day for the brothel, because the other stores are closed.

The Bulmer's suspicion that the Tuina Center was a brothel was confirmed when they read men's descriptions of buying sex there on an Internet guide to prostitution. Another business

owner in the strip mall emailed the Bulmers the men's Internet writings describing prostitution and the prices for different sex acts they bought there.

Shortly after that, Eric found several hypodermic needles and syringes with blood in them on the ground in the parking lot in front of his business. Eric believes the needles were used by men before they entered the brothel. Eric filed a police report.

Hema described the women at the brothel as always "painted up." She said the women look to be in their thirties and are all Asian. There is frequently a new set of women. Last year, the women were Chinese with red hair. This year, there are some Japanese women, and they have a different look. There are usually two to three women in the brothel at any given time, and "Mary" stops by occasionally, sometimes bringing a rice cooker.

When the Bulmers arrive at work early in the morning, they can see into the brothel through an open door. They can see hot plates and a family size refrigerator. Eric has observed the women hanging their clothes on railings and bushes outside the brothel. Sometimes, they stand outside and talk on their cell phones in the parking lot. The women are never seen leaving the brothel by themselves.

The Bulmers say men often circle the parking lot several times trying to find the spa. Once, Hema, who is Asian, said a man saw her sitting outside her store in the summer and stopped her to ask her about the brothel.

On a number of occasions, the Bulmers have contacted the police to let them know what was going on. The police told them there was nothing they could do about it.

Late last year, a woman from the brothel came into their store and frantically tried to ask for help. She appeared to be in her thirties and carried a tiny purse and suitcase. Only knowing a few words of English, she used hand gestures to try to communicate. She pointed to the brothel and used gestures to communicate sex acts and said the word "f\*\*\*" to express she was being forced to engage in sex acts. She used gestures to communicate that the women eat and sleep in the brothel. In an attempt maybe to warn Hema and Eric, the woman pointed to their young daughter and then the brothel and said, "Baby. Bad. Bad."

Hema asked if she wanted them to call the police, and the woman said, "Me, no English. You." Hema called the police. She also indicated she was trying to get on a bus to New York.

The parents that shop at and bring their children to the science center have become aware that there is a brothel next door. One science instructor was asked by a student's mother how they felt about the brothel being next door. The Bulmers believe that parents will be uncomfortable coming to their center if they know there is a brothel next door.

The Bulmers tried to get the building inspector, Jack Kane, to take action. The brothel is violating the zoning code that prohibits a commercial space from being used as a residence.

The building inspector denied seeing signs that the women were living at the brothel. The Bulmers are frustrated about the lack of zoning, health and fire code enforcement.

A couple of years after the brothel opened, a space opened next to the brothel and POW Science, who had seniority, wanted to expand. The Lee Health Tuina Center wanted the space also. Eric showed the property owner evidence from the Internet that the place was a brothel. The Bulmers asked Vicki Tarsagian, the property owner, to evict them. She said they could do that if POW Science was willing to renegotiate their lease and pay rent for all of the space rented by the Tuina Center. Eric told her "You shouldn't evict them as a personal favor to me. You should evict them because it's the right thing to do." Subsequently, the Tarsagians rented the space to the spa brothel so they could build a "table shower" room.

"Mary" came over to POW Science after the construction was completed with a large bag of gifts to give to Hema and Eric's daughter to apologize for the noise during construction. Hema refused the gift. Other neighbors have told the Bulmers that they have offered them gifts, too.

As a result of failed efforts to get the property owners and the city of Middletown to take action against the brothel, the Bulmers are moving the POW Science center.

Property owner Vicki Tarsagian was asked to comment. She became flustered and quickly said she had a meeting and couldn't talk.

Eric said, "Through inaction, they are clearly choosing prostitutes over educational programs and a business of our quality, so we will take our school donations, revenue, taxes and advertising dollars elsewhere, to a town that does deserve quality as high as ours."

August will be POW Sciences' last month in the space. It will relocate to another part of the state to get away from the brothel next door.