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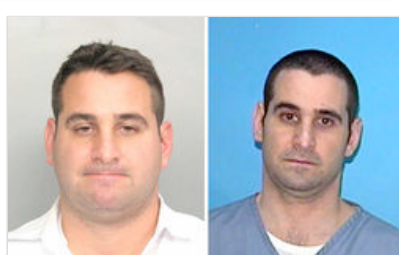
Miami Cop Michael Ragusa Raped Dozens, New Documents Show

By **Dan Christensen** Thursday, Apr 5 2012

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There was little public discussion last fall when Miami commissioners voted unanimously to pay \$550,000 to a 31-year-old working mom who had been kidnapped and raped by a city police officer in his patrol car.

But for 53 minutes in private before the vote, commissioners heard a disturbing earful from city lawyers, who mentioned dozens of other sexual assaults and a stunning breakdown of police hiring practices under former chief **John Timoney**.



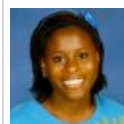
Florida Corrections
Michael Ragusa (left) in a 2007 mug shot and in a more recent photo.

The lawyers' concerns, which have never before been disclosed, provide a frightening backstage look at Florida's highest-profile police force. They stem from a lawsuit filed by a rape victim named **Kenia Perez** against the city over the actions of her attacker, ex-officer **Michael Ragusa**, who grew up in Fort Lauderdale.

"Both our officers and the City of Miami Beach police officers believed that there were dozens of people that he [raped]," assistant city attorney **Henry Hunnefeld** told commissioners in a closed-door meeting this past October 13. "Dozens."

The roots of the rape cases, which the **FBI** is investigating, date back to before Ragusa was hired — to the day in 2002 when former police

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chief **Kaul Martinez** installed **Willie F. Bell** as a background investigator, apparently to get him off the streets, Hunnefeld said.

Bell had a dismal internal record as a cop. He'd been disciplined for using excessive force, neglect of duty, improper discharge of a firearm, and theft. He was also arrested for battery, falsifying public records, and official misconduct, but those criminal charges were dropped after Bell agreed to attend an anger management program.

"From the time [Bell] was selected," Hunnefeld told commissioners, "bad things happened... He is the most disciplined officer in the history of the city. Twenty-six times he was disciplined by our department."

The year after Bell's hire, Timoney became Miami's police chief. A tough former New York cop, he quickly became infamous for his handling of riots that shook the Magic City during meetings to discuss the **Free Trade Area of the Americas**. Bell remained at his post while the new chief led a push to recruit officers. As Timoney wrote in his 2003 "Blueprint for the Future" report, the focus was "not on how to improve the quality of the men and women on the MPD, but the urgent need to increase their quantity."

In the '80s and '90s, bad hires had led to scandal and embarrassment. Between 1990 and 2001, Miami paid nearly \$18 million to resolve more than 110 federal and state lawsuits alleging brutality, misconduct, or unnecessary death caused by city police. And in 2001, more than a dozen officers were indicted for conspiring to cover up police shootings by planting evidence. Nine were later convicted.

Timoney pledged to restore the public's trust.

Then, in the early morning of March 19, 2007, 31-year-old Kenia Perez stepped off a county bus in Miami Beach on her way home from a ten-hour shift at a South Beach restaurant where she waited tables six days a week to support herself and her 5-year-old son.

Ragusa was there. He lived in Miami Beach and was driving his take-home patrol car in uniform. He called Perez over, forced her inside, drove a few blocks away, and raped her. He was arrested the next day.

The attack left lasting psychological scars on Perez, who no longer lives in the United States. She was afraid to be alone and suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder, the transcript says. Her name has never before been revealed, but her attorney, **Barbara Heyer**, said she wanted it known.

Ragusa pleaded guilty in 2008 to charges of rape and attempted rape for attacks on three women in Miami Beach — including Perez. He has served nearly five years of his ten-year prison sentence.

Miami police spokesman Major Delrish Moss said he was unaware of the city attorney's statements to commissioners that Ragusa is believed to have had dozens of other victims. "If there were dozens of cases, and I have never heard anyone allege this, the Miami Beach PD or the State Attorney's Office would be investigating rather than us. We were only the hiring and later firing agency with regard to [Ragusa's] employment," he said.

Crime and Law

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agency with regard to [Ragusa's] employment," he said.

Perez filed her lawsuit against the city in 2010. Among other things, it alleged Timoney failed to institute any meaningful change. It also contended that, under the Dublin-born chief, the city failed to weed out officers like Ragusa with "dangerous propensities" that made them unfit for duty.

The transcript, uncovered by *Broward Bulldog* in cooperation with *Miami New Times*, discloses city attorneys believed that under Timoney, pressure was put on the department's psychologist to qualify recruits such as Ragusa who should not have been hired.

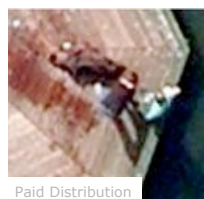
Another problem was Officer Bell. According to the city's attorneys, he gave a green light to hire Ragusa in 2004 despite admissions on an employment application of numerous incidents of illegal sexual activity and dishonesty.

In his presentation to the commission, Hunnefeld described Bell as uniquely unqualified for the important job of checking out recruits for a troubled police agency with a decades-old "reputation of having bad cops who do bad things."

Bell, a 26-year officer who retired in 2006, is now 55 years old. In an interview, he acknowledged his lengthy discipline record. He said drug dealers lodged most of those complaints in attempts to discredit him when he worked the streets in Liberty City and Overtown. He also confirmed he had approved Ragusa's hiring, adding he did so because "there was nothing negative in his background."

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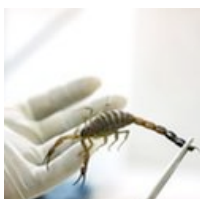


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