

# Today's PIs more like 'The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit'

All you Tom Selleck and Mike Connors fans, take note. Despite the TV hype, most private investigators would remind you of an average, everyday person — a Buddy Ebsen, for instance.

The gumshoe image portrayed over the years doesn't fit today's private investigators. Probably it never did fit them. . . . there are still a lot of mundane, tiring and, yes, even boring, aspects to being a private investigator.

But the rewards can be more than merely monetary, according to Tampa p.i. John Russell, executive director of the Florida Association of Private Investigators.

For instance, Russell's organization recently launched the Bureau of Missing Children, Inc., and has come up with a unique plan to help in the location of children of parental abduction and those who are criminally kidnapped.

"We have asked the members of the association to donate specific hours to this cause, and to indicate the cost of these hours were they to charge for them in the course of their work. I just sent out the letters Jan. 10, and so far, we've had \$90,000 hours worth of time donated.

"I plan to go to all those licensed as private investigators in the state, and there are 90,000 of them, including 70,000 who are security guards, and ask them to donate their time. We are also going to all the other states and asking for donations of time for this project. Our plan is to have people in every state who are part of this program."

Russell is gratified by the response from his fellow investigators and is enthusiastic about their ability to help locate missing children.

"All the other organizations who work with missing children are fine . . . they do a great job. But we are professional investigators and we are able to do things others can't. We outnumber law enforcement officers four to one, for instance, and we aren't hampered by some of the red tape the police officers have to contend with to get information. We can use a variety of contacts — and a private investigator is dead without his contacts — to obtain information."

By April 1, Russell plans to have an office for this bureau at the Marriot at Tampa International Airport. In addition, the organization is sponsoring a fishing tournament in May to help fund the bureau.

Russell feels the individual expertise of the

private investigators will be invaluable in locating children, especially in parental kidnapping cases.

"There is one investigator in Sarasota, for instance, who used to work for the FBI. He is an expert in document investigation. There are lawyers who are members who have donated their time for legal services for the custody parents who are trying to get their children back. It is estimated it costs \$10,000 to track down the other parent and go through the legal red tape to get a child back and many people can't afford this — especially since many of those who are looking for their children are the wives who don't have the income to spend on the investigation and paperwork."

Despite the hard-charging image of the private investigator, Russell said most of the "gumshoes" he knows work for insurance companies or businesses.

"We do pre-employment investigations and check businesses for security. We are also involved in insurance investigations, such as for workman's compensation. For instance, we will follow someone who claims a disability to see if they are indeed disabled and unable to return to work. If they are out jogging each morning and claim they have a leg injury which keeps them from work, then it gets suspicious."

In criminal investigations, detectives check out an alibi or interview character witnesses. In accident cases where there is a product liability, private investigators work either for the plaintiff — the person who claims a product defect — or the defense — usually a corporation. "Private investigators who specialize in this type of case usually work for one side or the other on a consistent basis. A corporation doesn't like to see the investigator working for them one week and for the plaintiff next week."

White collar crimes also are among those investigated by the detectives. "They say that employee theft is a major crime — 75 percent of all employees will steal. Twenty-five would steal from the company, no matter what; the other 50 percent would steal if given the opportunity, or a disinterested business management."

In addition to these various areas of expertise which Russell feels will be invaluable in the loca-



John Russell

tion of abducting parents, the bureau plans on having an advisory board of law enforcement, judicial and elected officials to help. Several already have donated their time.

"We can offer a valuable service to people in a time of stress. We can go beyond flyers and the NCIC computers. This is how we can help find these missing children," he concluded.



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