

**OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADVOCATE  
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY COMMISSION ON ETHICS & PUBLIC TRUST  
REPORT OF INVESTIGATION**

#K11-006

Date Opened: 01/10/2011

Date Closed: 02/25/11

Investigator: Sylvia Batista and Karl Ross

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On December 27, 2010 the COE received a tip that City of Opa-Locka Police Chief Cheryl Cason was selling men's ties from the back of her City-issued police vehicle while wearing her police uniform. It was alleged that Chief Cason visited businesses located along NW 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue and solicited sales from employees of those businesses. It was further alleged that an employee of one of the businesses purchased a tie set from the chief for \$25 and that the owner of a nearby convenience store declined the solicitation.

The COE's issue relates to a violation of the Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance Section 2-11.1(g) *Prohibition on exploitation of official position.*

**01/20/11 –**

COE investigator spoke to Mr. Donald White, office manager of a landscaping company, by telephone. According to Mr. White, Chief Cason visited a neighboring business several days before Christmas. Mr. White greeted the Chief, who then told him that she was selling ties for "somebody" and asked whether he might be interested in purchasing one. Mr. White advised that Chief Cason showed him the ties which were in the back of her vehicle with other boxes.

The boxes contained “tie sets” which include the tie, tie pin, matching handkerchief and cuff links. Mr. White explained that they looked to be okay and he purchased one tie set from the Chief for \$25. Mr. White advised that Chief Cason has been back since then to the same location to sell more ties.

**01/25/11 –**

COE investigators visited Mr. White’s place of employment for a statement. Mr. White, who is a retired Miami-Dade County police officer, advised that he is the office manager of Road Runner landscaping service. Mr. White explained that several days before Christmas, on a Friday afternoon, he saw the Chief who had come to a neighboring business. Mr. White explained that he was outside talking to his associate when Chief Cason drove up in her City issued Expedition. Mr. White and Chief Cason began talking and she explained to him that she was selling ties for somebody, but did not say for whom. Mr. White looked into the trunk of the Chief’s vehicle and saw that there were several boxes containing tie sets. Chief Cason showed him the tie sets and he asked the price. Chief Cason said the cost of a tie set was \$25. Mr. White purchased a tie set from the Chief. Mr. White affirmed that the Chief was wearing her police uniform at the time. The Chief took the \$25 from Mr. White and drove off. According to Mr. White, the owner of the convenience store did not purchase a tie set from Chief Cason.

COE approached the convenience store owner whose name was given as “Mike” and Mike identified that he was the owner of Maritza Market. Asked about whether he had been approached by the police chief and asked to buy a tie set, Mike questioned the purpose of the inquiry and did not appear inclined to

cooperate. When he was again asked about any solicitation, Mike said that his brother may have been approached by Chief Cason, but that he had not been approached. He said his brother was in Israel and would not return for three months. COE asked him for his brother's name and contact information.

**2/15/11 – Cheryl Cason, former City of Opa-Locka Police Chief –**

On 2/15/11 Ms. Cason rendered a verbal statement concerning the aforementioned allegation. Present were Ms. Cason's pro bono legal counsel, Philip J. Mandina, Esq., Chief Cheryl Cason, and her Executive Secretary, Clancy Huckleberry. Mr. Mandina and Chief Cason discussed the identity of the person they think provided the information to the COE and why.

Chief Cason provided the COE investigators and advocate with a copy of a notarized letter from a "Mr. Amin" of French Quality Cleaners. The letter signed by Mr. Amin states that Chief Cason bought a number of silk ties, cufflinks and pocket handkerchief sets to be used as Christmas gifts. Chief Cason also provided the COE with a list of eight people whom she advised were recipients of the tie sets from her as Christmas presents. Chief Cason explained that the tie sets come in a box containing the tie, cufflinks and pocket handkerchief. Chief Cason explained that she did not gift wrap the boxes but only placed a Christmas bow on each one.

Chief Cason explained that she gave the tie sets as Christmas presents with the exception of one tie set that she sold to Donald White. Chief Cason knows Mr. White who is a retired Miami-Dade police officer and who was hired by the City of Opa Locka police as a crime scene investigator.

Chief Cason explained that on the day that she sold the tie set to Mr. White, she had stopped at the food market located on N.W. 145<sup>th</sup> Street and 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue like she often does on her way home from work. Chief Cason explained that the tie sets were in the back of her City-issued black Expedition. Chief Cason stated that she bought a newspaper and some water, walked out and opened up the back of her vehicle to put away the newspaper when Mr. White approached her. Chief Cason explained that she and Mr. White began to talk when he noticed the tie sets in the back of the vehicle and asked what they were for. Chief Cason responded that they were Christmas presents, but that he was not on her Christmas list. Chief Cason advised that she told Mr. White that he could buy one from her or that, if he preferred, he could “make a donation.” She did not say what the donation would have gone toward. Chief Cason said she and Mr. White agreed on a price and that he purchased a tie set from the Chief. Chief Cason said she does not recall how much she charged Mr. White for the tie set. Chief Cason states that while in the food store she did not offer tie sets to the owner (Mike) and does not know Mike’s brother. Chief Cason does not remember talking to Mike on that occasion.

Chief Cason advised that she bought about 25 tie sets from Mr. Amin and paid for them with a check which included her payment for dry cleaning services.

For reasons unrelated to this investigation, Chief Cason was demoted shortly after giving her statement to the COE .

**2/16/11 – Mr. Amin of French Quality Cleaners –**

A COE investigator called Mr. Amin who rendered his statement by telephone. Mr. Amin recalls that he sold between 25 and 30 tie sets to Ms. Cason

for \$15 each. Mr. Amin sells the tie sets at the same price regardless of the number of tie sets being bought. Mr. Amin explained that Ms. Cason bought tie sets from him only on this occasion and she told him that she intended to use them as Christmas presents. Ms. Cason paid for the tie sets with a check that also included her payment for dry cleaning services.

**2/22/11 – John Riley**

Mr. Riley is one of the people on Ms. Cason’s gift list. A COE investigator called Mr. Riley who advised that he received three tie sets from Ms. Cason, kept one set and gave the others to his sons. Mr. Riley said that they were gifts and that Ms. Cason did not ask for anything in return.

**2/25/11 - Chief Adam Burden, acting police chief City of Opa-Locka**

A COE investigator called Chief Burden who stated that he was aware that former Chief Cason had a “truck full” of tie sets that she kept in her official vehicle. Chief Burden advised that some time during the holidays last year, Ms. Cason showed him the tie sets and asked him to select one as a gift. Chief Burden said he examined the tie sets and politely declined her offer, but said that at no point did Ms. Cason attempt to sell him anything. Chief Burden said, furthermore, that he was not aware if Ms. Cason tried to sell the tie sets to anybody else in the department. Chief Burden advised that Ms. Cason is presently relieved of duty, with pay, but he declined to elaborate on the reason for her demotion.

**Conclusion:**

COE investigators did not find conclusive evidence that former police chief Cheryl Cason violated the Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Ordinance. For that

reason, no further action will be taken at this time by the COE on this matter. However, Ms. Cason did receive “pro bono” i.e. free legal representation from attorney Phil Mandina which constitutes a “gift.” Consequently, Ms. Cason should file a gift disclosure form by no later than the end of June 2011.