

# Three teens arrested in Ceres in connection with human trafficking ring

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Three teenagers, including a 15-year-old girl, were arrested by Ceres police on Thursday on suspicion of participating in a prostitution ring involving minors.

During the last few weeks Ceres detectives have been following up on multiple tips about the ring and on Wednesday, posing as a customer, set up a sting at Ceres hotel, said Sgt. Danny Vierra.

About 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, a Ford Contour with four teens inside arrived at the hotel. A 16-year-old girl got out and the three others left the hotel in the Ford.

Some detectives stayed and detained the 16-year-old for suspected solicitation of prostitution while others followed the Ford. An undercover detective initiated a traffic stop on Henderson Road but the the driver failed to yield, Vierra said.

A pursuit ensued, lasting just under five minutes and reaching speeds of 65 mph in residential neighborhoods, until an officer driving a marked patrol car disabled the Ford using a PIT maneuver (or precision immobilization technique, in which the pursuing officer steers sharply into the target vehicle and causes its driver to lose control) in the 1700 block of Booth Road.

Marcus Lopez, 18; a 16-year-old boy; and a 15-year-old girl were taken into custody. Detectives searched the Ford and found two loaded handguns inside as well as a large sum of cash, according to a news release.

Vierra said all three are suspected of trafficking the 16-year-old girl who was dropped off at the hotel, as well as at least two other high school-age girls. He said detectives believe there are more victims who have not been identified.

There is evidence, Vierra said, that the 15-year-old girl “was also was prostituting and bringing other girls into the trade.” He said she is a ward of the court, was listed as a runaway at the time of her arrest and had been reported missing multiple times in the past.

Lopez was booked into jail and the two minors were booked into juvenile hall. The 16-year-old girl was taken home to her parents. All four are from the Modesto and Ceres area.

The three arrestees face charges including human trafficking, pimping, pandering and weapons charges.

Vierra and detectives are working to identify other potential victims. Anyone with information on the case is asked to call the Ceres Police Department or Detective Julio Amador at [209-538-5729](tel:209-538-5729). Callers can remain anonymous.

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Marcus Lopez Ceres Police Department