

Manteca Police fight human trafficking

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MANTECA — Multiple law enforcement agencies conducted an operation against human trafficking that resulted in the arrest of more than a dozen people in Manteca last week.

Manteca Police Department, with the aid of the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office, the San Joaquin County District Attorney's Office and the Department of Homeland Security, arrested 18 people on Friday for various offenses related to human trafficking.

Many of the charges, Manteca Police said, were related to prostitution. Seven women and one man were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct and prostitution, while three men were arrested on charges of assisting prostitution.

Three of those arrested were charged with contacting a minor with the intent to commit a sexual offense: Matthew Alan Avants, Jose Luis Mendoza, and Markjayson Basamot Quimoyog. Mendoza was also charged with resisting or obstructing an officer, and Quimoyog was also charged with sending harmful material to a minor, police said.

All three were booked into San Joaquin County Jail, the department said.

Sgt. Michael Aguilar of the Manteca Police Department said the other 15 people were cited and released.

The primary goals of the operation were to rescue victims of human trafficking and arrest sexual predators involving minors, Aguilar said. But there were no victims rescued during the 10-hour operation, because all arrested had admitted to being consenting adults, he said.

"Our main goal is to talk to some of the people involved and to determine if they are, in fact, victims," he said. "Then we can provide the proper resources for them."

Aguilar could not divulge specifics of the arrests but said detectives did use social media during their investigation.

Detectives are aware that prostitution does occur in Manteca, Aguilar said, as they encounter the activity on some patrols.

Upon speaking with some of those involved, officers have learned that many are runaways or juveniles who have become victims of human trafficking, he said.

He said, however, an operation such as Friday's is relatively new to the department.

"We've seen it happening in Manteca, and there was a need for us to get training for it and do some proactive enforcement," he said. "We don't want it to ignore it so it gets to the point where it's prevalent in the city."

Also aiding Manteca police in the operation was the district attorney's Victim-Witness Program, and the Women's Center Youth & Family Services, which has made the fight against human trafficking a top priority.

Although there were no human trafficking victims rescued Friday, Aguilar said the department was pleased with its efforts.

"It's our intent to continue with similar operations," he said. "I thought the operation was highly successful, given it only lasted one evening and for being our first time doing something like this."

— Contact reporter Wes Bowers at (209) 546-8258 or Follow him at recordnet.com/bowersblog and on Twitter