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Lafleur could dodge law forever

Money, ingenuity all ad man needs to avert arrest, consultant says

By LES PERREAUX

MONTREAL — Wanted ad man Jean Lafleur could dodge the long arm of the law for some time if he decides to hide out in Latin America rather than face fraud charges stemming from the sponsorship scandal, law enforcement experts say.

Quebec provincial police issued a warrant for Lafleur's arrest this week after admitting they don't know where to find the man who made millions from the scandal.

Lafleur, who faces 35 counts of fraud totalling \$1.6 million, was last seen in 2005 living it up in Costa Rica, where neighbours complained about late-night partying.

He's kept a lower profile since then, paying for an expensive apartment in Old Montreal but never appearing there.

His Quebec driver's licence has lapsed and a former neighbour in Costa Rica said he doesn't know where Lafleur has gone.

While Lafleur's intentions are unclear — his lawyer and several family members did not return phone calls Tuesday — he could spend a long time underground, according to a retired RCMP officer familiar with international investigations.

Donald Pelley, who spent years based overseas for the RCMP acting as a link to foreign police forces, says a little money and ingenuity are all he needs.

"In these kinds of cases if the person doesn't want to be found, they have a pretty good chance of not being found," said Pelley, who now runs a consulting firm called Kridon Enterprises based in New Brunswick.

"If you go to a country, change your name, build up an identity, you can hide pretty well."

Pelley, who worked closely with Interpol, said police will have to rely on old fashioned detective work and personal contacts to find him.

Lafleur's lease expires in May but he still has family in Canada, including a daughter.

"He's still got mail (circulating in Canada), there are wiretaps available to police with the approval of a judge," Pelley said.

"There are leads there for them to go to work on, but it takes longer than the 30 minutes on a TV show."

Gerry Jennings, another retired RCMP officer who is now a security consultant, said many

Canadians have a skewed image of the information available at the fingertips of crime investigators.

"What you see in (the TV drama) CSI where somebody goes over to a computer and they suddenly have access to all these different data bases from any police force or the telephone system, that's for the movies," said Jennings, who is based in St. Paul, Man. and specializes in cross-border security.

There's no replacement for good investigative work, he said.

Lafleur's company made some \$65 million from government business from 1995 to 2003.

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