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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Three El Paso-area Bars Shut Down Permanently as a Result of Law Enforcement Operations by TABC and the El Paso County Attorney's Office

"Operation Three Thorns" results in 59 felony charges

EL PASO - Three central El Paso bars with confirmed association to the violent Barrio Azteca gang shut their doors permanently today after surrendering their TABC licenses as part of a pre-trial settlement entered last week in the 327th District Court.

The Golden Nugget Bar, located at 5711 Trowbridge; the Doll House Bar, located at 5715 Trowbridge; and the George Washington Lounge, located at 3900 Montana, were all facing contempt charges for violating court orders stemming from a nuisance abatement lawsuit filed by the County Attorney's Office.

TABC approached the El Paso County Attorney's Office to seek restraining orders and injunctions against the three bars using the Texas Nuisance Abatement statute, as well as Section 101.01 of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Code. On August 29, 2014, 41st District Judge Annabel Perez granted temporary restraining orders ruling the establishments be immediately closed until a court date could be set. On September 12, 2014, the three bars were allowed to re-open after agreeing to a court order setting certain conditions for them to operate, including not violating the TABC and Texas Nuisance laws, in addition to taking affirmative steps to curb criminal activity in their bars.

In an effort to ensure compliance with the court orders and other state laws, TABC conducted additional investigations after the bars re-opened. Investigators found the three bars were continuing to engage in criminal activity and had violated the court ordered agreement. Using these investigations, El Paso County Attorney's Office filed a motion for contempt with the 327th Judicial District Court. Even after this motion was filed, the El Paso Police Department conducted its own investigation of the bars and found that the criminal activity continued. Based on these new findings, a supplemental violation for contempt was filed May 8, 2015.

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Rather than go through with the hearings on these motions for contempt, the owners of the three bars agreed to the cancellation of their TABC licenses. As a result of the cancellation, the bars were forced to shut down. In addition, state law prohibits the owners of the bars from obtaining a TABC permit to sell alcohol for a minimum of one year.

“While the vast majority of TABC-licensed businesses are in full compliance of the law, occasionally there are a few bad operators and steps must be taken to prevent them from being a nuisance to public safety and the overall quality of life in the community,” said Dexter K. Jones, TABC Assistant Chief of Audit and Investigations. “Thanks to our partnership with the El Paso County Attorney’s Office and investigators from federal, state and local agencies, we were able to curtail the potential for criminal activity in the area. We will continue to investigate those involved with this case, and will likely pursue further charges as the investigation continues.”

“The closing of these three bars demonstrates the power of community members, law enforcement agencies and the County of El Paso working together to clean up El Paso,” said Jo Anne Bernal, El Paso County Attorney. “Nuisance abatement laws serve a very important purpose by allowing us to confront property and business owners who do not make any reasonable effort to curb criminal activity on their premises. These laws encourage community cooperation to make our neighborhoods safer.”

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