

Aspen gets its first private eye

by Bill Rollins

Two weeks ago, on Friday the 13th, Aspen got its first private eye.

Robert W. (Pete) Peterson announced that he would be available for private investigations on a 24 hour a day basis through Gene Fuller at the Woodshed in the Mill Street Station.

Peterson will continue to live and keep his main office in Denver, but he hopes that there will be criminal defense, missing persons, and personal security work here.

Peterson has been a private detective in Denver for the past seven years, after three in auto repair. He went to the School for Criminal Justice at Red Rocks to get his start.

He came to Vail and Aspen in 1977 as Olivia Newton John's body guard after she received threats on her life. Peterson has also acted as a body guard for a Saudi Arabian, guarding his plane with automatic rifles.

Missing Persons

A couple of missing persons cases — one in Denver and another in Chicago — have also brought him to Aspen in the past.

Most of his recent cases have involved criminal defense work for private citizens, he said. He was hired not long ago by a Chicano in Denver who had been charged with 19 counts of aggravated robbery and faced 40 years in jail.

By the time Peterson got through with his investigation, the charges had been reduced to one count of felony menacing.

The work was not glamorous. It involved methodical review of the police and district attorney's recross-examination of all the witnesses, and endless interviews. Peterson was able to come

stances, Peterson showed persons mug shots of persons who looked like his client and got them to admit they could have been wrong in their identification.

Peterson has a permit to carry a gun in a shoulder holster, but he has never had to use it. Wiretapping and eavesdropping were outlawed in Colorado in 1968 and Peterson said he tries to stay as far away from that as possible.

Limited Hardware

He admits using an infra-red night scope to watch persons in the dark, however, and said there is now a transmitter for tailing vehicles. Like the beeper locator used for downed aircraft, it attaches easily to the vehicle that is to be followed.

"It's primarily leg work, the same sort of thing that goes into good investigative journalism," Peterson said, minimizing the "hardware" required for his job.

He said some cases have proved "a little too exciting."

He was hired by an oil company in Wyoming that was losing \$5,000 to \$8,000 a day in thefts of crude oil.

"You could disappear up there if you were found out because reputations and millions are at stake," he said. "We were dealing with heavyweights, people who pace irons, organized crime in cowboy hats."

Pending Worries

Peterson is reluctant to disclose many details of his cases for obvious reasons.

"People wind up missing in gullies," he said. "Nobody has ever made it to court to testify against this one person who ripped off an entire county there."

"We were able to save our client \$156,000 in overruns by a subcontractor finally by using an undercover man. We bluffed them. We had invoices, times-references

first year," Peterson said. "I didn't get any of the glamorous stuff. But it's not dull."

Peterson was hired by some Colorado bankers who own part of a Las Vegas hotel. Again, he is somewhat vague about details because the case is still pending.

"There was some unorthodox cheating going on," he said. "We got admissions through undercover agents from the people doing it, but we don't know exactly how they were doing it. They had radio transceivers and other sophisticated gadgets that defeated the casino's built-in security measures."

Life Threatened

During the Las Vegas investigation, Peterson received a telephone call threatening his life. He was told that he talked too much to the cops.

Peterson told the caller that he had developed a "death insurance policy."

"If anything happens to us," Peterson said he told the caller, "we have a back-up system that insures the same thing will happen to you whether it's your fault or not."

Nothing has happened to Peterson yet, but he admits, "I get a little nervous. Once while driving in the west end of Las Vegas he heard the popping sounds of small caliber gunfire coming from an old beat-up brown van. "The bullets were going by close enough so that we could hear the 'phing, phing' sounds," he said. "But I don't believe they were really trying to hit us."

Depending on the requirements of a case, Peterson said he can use four or five operatives including an ex-FBI agent, and Vikki, an attractive blonde who he said is "good at eliciting information over dinner."



Robert W. Peterson recently set up an Aspen number where he can be reached 24 hours a day for private detective work.

Photo by Chris Cassari

like being a magician. You don't want to reveal your tricks or the other guys will pick up on them." In advance. We usually get it done.

The number of hours Peterson works varies tremendously and so do his fees. Peterson turns down paper-serving work, repossessing cars, and said that divorce work is "almost passe" too. "We're primarily