

Following the money



Taking money away from criminals is all in a day's work for Mike Petty who leads an investigations team with a single aim: to recover more than it costs the AFP to fund the team.

It had seemed like an average day on the job, and Federal Agent Mike Petty and a colleague were wrapping up after successfully serving an order restraining the house, land, car, boat and bank account of a retired motorcycle club member.

"As we walked down the driveway, we heard what I would have sworn to be a gunshot," recounted Mike who is now team leader of the Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering teams in the AFP's Brisbane Office.

"We both flinched and looked at each other, expecting that one of us had been shot, but we were both fine.

"The man had been so upset about receiving the restraining order he slammed the door hard enough to crack the door frame, hence the noise."

Mike joined the AFP as a recruit in 1987 after spending three years in the Victoria Police. He became dissatisfied dealing with drunks, violent offenders and street crime, and liked the options of international travel and interstate transfers that the AFP offered.

His early days in the AFP were spent guarding the Turkish Consulate in Melbourne, then he moved to airport policing and spent some time doing uniformed policing duties at the family court.

Mike was then moved to an investigator position in the Fraud

and General Crime group. He spent a few years there, and then moved to the Drug Branch. It was from these areas that he moved into investigating Proceeds of Crime cases.

Mike believes that financial investigations are the most interesting area to work in.

"I get the greatest satisfaction taking money off criminals," Mike said.

"It's all about following the money."

Mike was a team member in Operation Socrates, part of the Australian Government's Project Wickenby, during which Steven Hart was convicted for tax fraud, and forfeited more than \$6 million in assets, including property and vintage aircraft. Project Wickenby brought together the resources of five government agencies, namely the Australian Taxation Office, the AFP, the Australian Crime Commission, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

Evidence was sourced from Hong Kong, Mauritius and New Zealand, and the team worked closely with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP). The team was made up of accountants, investigators and administrative assistants who, at first, looked forward to the travel. The holiday atmosphere ended when they

realised they had to manage tens of thousands of documents. The CDPP provided a lawyer to travel with them and to assist in gathering the evidence required to make a water-tight case.

"The cooperative effort resulting in such a good outcome made this the most satisfying case I have been involved in," Mike said.

Transnational money laundering and concealment of criminal assets has now become easier due to cheaper transport costs and the rapid growth of electronic communications systems.

The AFP's overseas liaison officers assist the financial investigations teams by collaborating with agencies such as Europol's Camden Asset Recovery Interagency Network. AUSTRAC's Egmont Group also assists the AFP to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorists.

Collaboration with external law enforcement agencies on a global scale helps the AFP to promote and implement measures to make it more difficult for criminals and terrorists to operate.

"The AFP has given me opportunities that I would not have had elsewhere," Mike said.

"Hard work, perseverance and taking responsibility for finding a solution are the most valuable lessons I have learned during my career."