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This Week in

GANG LAND

The Online Column

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By Jerry Capeci

Fat Andy's Son Takes On Skinny Dom



Anthony (Fat Andy) Ruggiano, (right) a belligerent, old-school Gambino soldier never admitted anything to the feds.

Before succumbing to a heart attack in 1999, he always fought them with everything he had, any way he could. Worst of all, he hated "rats" who became informers.

But last week, sources tell Gang Land, Ruggiano's son, Anthony Jr., who followed his old man into the "life," officially turned on his bloodlines, and agreed to testify at the upcoming murder and racketeering trial of the mobster who took over his father's crew.



"If he wasn't dead, his old man would probably kill himself," said an old denizen of Ozone Park, Queens who first told Gang Land that the younger Ruggiano and his wife had disappeared from their Queens home and had surely begun cooperating.

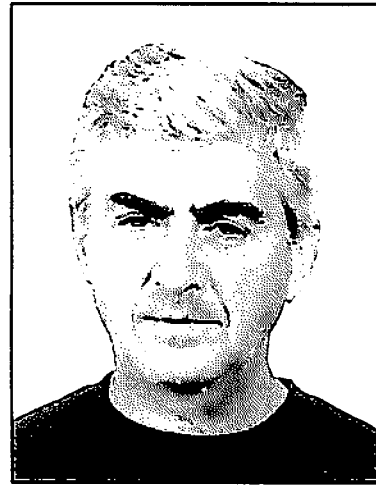
"It came as a complete surprise, but at this juncture, it's eminently clear that he's no longer a defendant, but a witness," said his former attorney, Anthony Lombardino, adding that the feds had told him that his client had retained new counsel.

Law enforcement sources have also confirmed that Ruggiano is cooperating with the feds and will testify against Gambino capo Dominick (Skinny Dom) Pizzonia in January. That's when his trial is set to begin in Brooklyn Federal

Court

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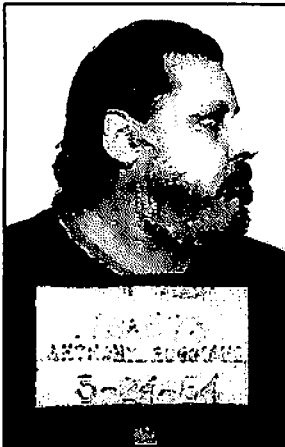
for the 1992 Christmas Eve slaying of a husband and wife robbery-team that preyed on mob social clubs, and for the 1988 slaying of Ruggiano's brother-in-law, Francesco Boccia.



Along with a now-deceased gangster, Pizzonia and Ruggiano whacked Boccia at the Café Liberty, a social club that Skinny Dom took over after Fat Andy died, according to court papers filed by assistant U.S. attorneys Mitra Hormozi and Joey Lipton.

That murder resulted from old-school mob values, and made Fat Andy proud.

Boccia was killed, sources said, because he "verbally and physically abused his mother-in-law" while he and his wife were living with her mother as Fat Andy was beginning a long prison stretch for a racketeering conviction.



Sources said Boccia's murder was "sanctioned" by then-family boss John Gotti, who had been disenchanted with Ruggiano and had sent him to Florida but nonetheless approved the slaying when he was told that Boccia had thrown Fat Andy's wife down a flight of stairs in a fit of anger.

Fat Andy, a gregarious and flamboyant wiseguy who cut his gangster teeth in Ozone Park, Queens as a Gotti rival, was like the Dapper Don when it came to the government.

During his mobster "life," he refused to testify before grand juries, he fled to avoid arrest – growing a wild beard and



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hanging with Hells Angels while on the lam. When he was finally caught, he forced the feds in Florida to take him to trial five times before he bit the dust.

The senior Ruggiano died two years after he concluded a 13 year stretch for racketeering in the Sunshine State.



But his invectives against so-called mob "rats" still evoke rave reviews from his old buddies in Queens.

During a tape-recorded tirade by a few of his cohorts that was played during the recent mistrial of Genovese capo **Ciro Perrone**, an old Ruggiano buddy, Gambino soldier **John Ambrosio**, (right) spoke glowingly about Fat Andy, ending his anecdote with the late mobster's oft-repeated wisdom about mob turncoats.

"You're born that way, my friend," said Ambrosio. "'You're born a rat, you're not made a rat,' Fat Andy always used to say. 'You're born a rat, you're not made a rat.'"

But that was then. These days, countered one law enforcement source, decisions to cooperate are based "on simple arithmetic, less time in prison, something most modern criminals have decided is more important than loyalty to the mob."

This latest defection gave the feds new ammunition for an old, unfinished battle. In court papers, without naming the younger Ruggiano, prosecutors cited his new role as a government witness to renew their efforts to oust Pizzonia's lawyer, **Joseph Corozzo**, (left) from the case on conflict of interest grounds stemming from a prior representation of Ruggiano.



Corozzo, who defeated an earlier disqualification effort involving another prosecution witness, could not be reached for comment. He is expected to contest the government's application next week at a scheduled conference before Judge Jack Weinstein.



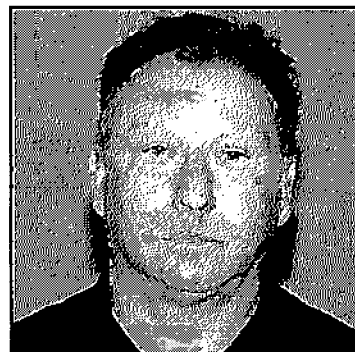
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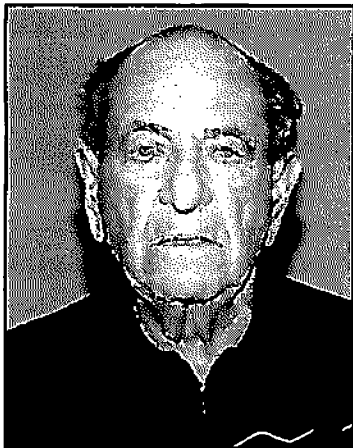
Feds Spike Mob's Hotdogs

The feds leveled racketeering charges this week against **Salvatore Battaglia**, (right) the president of Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, confirming a Gang Land report last week that a former union official had secretly pleaded guilty and was cooperating in a probe of the scandal tarred union that represents city school bus drivers.



The charges upped the ante considerably for the embattled union president. Battaglia now faces up to 20 years in prison and \$2.7 million in forfeiture rather than five years – and usually much less – for conviction of a lone obstruction of justice count that he had faced.

The new 10-count racketeering indictment alleges that Battaglia – whose mob nickname is “Hotdogs” – is a made member of the Genovese family who since 2004 has extorted tens of thousands of dollars from the owners of “numerous bus companies” in exchange for not organizing their workers. The feds say Hotdogs schemed with acting Genovese boss Matthew (Matty the Horse) Ianniello in a host of other labor crimes, including bribery and obstruction of justice.



The charges, law enforcement sources said, stem from the cooperation of the union’s former secretary-treasurer, Julius (Spike) Bernstein, 86, (left) a longtime labor racketeer and crime partner of Matty the Horse.

Bernstein’s belated cooperation, and that of another co-defendant, gave a huge boost to an FBI probe that was cut short, and then quickly brought to the indictment stage when the targets found a hidden video camera at a Queens eatery that the agents had also bugged. A bitter irony for the FBI was that the camera yielded poor quality, virtually useless pictures.

The bug, which no one ever found, worked pretty well.

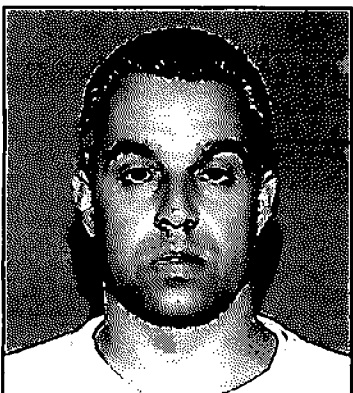
Through Bernstein, prosecutors were able to raise the stakes for Battaglia, and force him to take a sabbatical from his union post to the joy of union dissidents



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who have been pressing the feds to kick the mob out of the 14,000 member union.



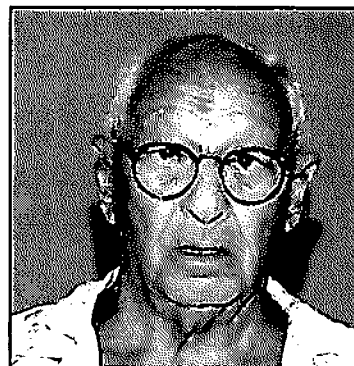
The cooperation of a butcher-gambler, who testified that his meat market was used as a drop-off spot for Perrone’s loanshark customers, was said by some jurors to have prevented an outright acquittal of Perrone and a mob cohort two weeks ago when jurors deadlocked 10-2 for acquittal.

A status conference for the indictment against Battaglia, 60, Perrone, 85, and wiseguy Steve Buscemi, 43, (left) is scheduled for Dec 8.

Meanwhile, Perrone's attorney Ronald Rubinstein took issue with several things in last week's column.

Despite assertions contained in FBI affidavits, his client does not own Don Peppe's, the Ozone Park Italian eatery that was bugged by the FBI. It is owned, he said, by Perrone's son-in-law, a friend, and two chefs.

Also, his client did not invite jurors to be his guests at a celebratory family-style dinner at Don Peppe's. It was Rubinstein who did "in jubilation over the outcome," he said. Two jurors attended, but Perrone, (right) who is on house arrest, did not. "He was there in spirit," said the lawyer, who declined to say who sprang for the check.



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