

Organized Crime

Gambino crime family braces for a betrayal

September 05, 2008

By: John Pacenti

There were few people trusted more by John Gotti than Lewis Kasman.

Web Extra: Indictment

Government's
response to
motions to exclude
witness and
proceed to trial

The former New Yorker, who now makes Boca Raton his home, managed Gotti's finances. And it was Kasman who retrieved the body of the Dapper Don when he died of throat cancer at a Missouri federal prison in 2002.

Self-described as Gotti's adopted son and chief of staff, Kasman even delivered the eulogy at the funeral of the Gambino mob boss.



David Markus

Now in a betrayal fit for the Old Testament, Kasman is said to be slated to testify against his old boss' son: John A. Gotti. The younger Gotti was indicted by a Tampa federal grand jury in a murder and racketeering case.

But first, Kasman will warm up as a witness in a mob trial centered on a real estate scam scheduled to start Monday in West Palm Beach before U.S. District Judge Donald Middlebrooks.

Prosecutors allege reputed mob boss Vincent "Little Vinny" Artuso and five other men were involved in a Gambino family real estate scam to defraud ADT Security Services.

In a court document that reads like a Martin Scorsese script, prosecutors outline Kasman's tale of how a Jewish kid became the sidekick to one of the most powerful Mafiosos in history.

Kasman came to the attention of South Florida prosecutors as an informant in New York mob cases, according to a response by the Miami U.S. attorney's office to a defense effort to exclude his testimony.

"Kasman, whose life would be in great jeopardy if his cooperation were to be revealed, was being kept in an undisclosed, secure location for his protection," the document reads.

South Florida prosecutors got Kasman on the phone in July, and he gave him the goods on Artuso, according to the Aug. 1 government response.

Artuso has long been linked to — but never prosecuted for — the hit on mob boss Paul "Big Pauley" Castellano that brought the elder Gotti to power.

"The government has always known that defendant Vincent Artuso is a formally inducted member of the Gambino Organized Crime Family of La Cosa Nostra," according to the government's response to the attempt to exclude Kasman.

Prosecutors said Kasman will testify that Artuso solicited him to participate in a scheme to buy ADT property below market value and lease back the property at inflated rates on 15-year, triple-net leases.

The scheme allegedly cheated Boca Raton-based ADT out of at least \$7 million over five years, and the lease payments moved through limited liability and front companies to the defendants.

Artuso had no comment when reached at his Palm Beach home. Neither did his attorney, Assistant Public Defender Peter Birch.

The Gambinos had a man on the inside, according to a July 22 superseding indictment updating charges filed in January.

William L. Horton, ADT's vice president of planning and implementation, was authorized by the company board to buy and sell property on the company's behalf. He sold properties in Pompano Beach, Palm Harbor, Illinois and Pennsylvania to businesses controlled by the defendants, the indictment alleges.

Horton, who received a cut of the profits, pleaded guilty to racketeering and is expected to testify for the government.

Other defendants besides Artuso include his son, John V. Artuso, Gregory Orr, Robert M. Gannon and Philip "Fip" Edward Forgoine.

They face a charge under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, nine counts of mail fraud, 15 counts of wire fraud, 15 counts of money laundering and one count of money laundering conspiracy.

Information provided by Kasman supported the addition of a RICO charge to the superseding indictment last month. Defense attorneys say Kasman is not to be trusted.

"Kasman has no connection to the case," said Miami criminal defense attorney David O. Markus, who represents Orr. "He's nothing but a gabber. He likes to talk. He talks a lot."

The defense failed to get Kasman or the 135 secretly taped conversations he made excluded from the trial. They even argued the wiretaps shouldn't be admitted because they violate Florida's statute requiring the consent of both sides to record conversations.

Markus, in a motion to exclude Kasman, said the prosecutors' move to add Kasman's testimony to the case was "an attempt to sandbag the defense."

Kasman, who wouldn't comment, has been keeping anything but a low profile.

After he spent eight days in a West Palm Beach jail for failing to pay child support, he publicly chastised the judge who put him there.

Palm Beach Circuit Judge Martin Colin failed to disclose that the attorney for Kasman's ex-wife worked for the law firm that represented the judge's wife.

Kasman's colorful past offers him a big stage in Florida. New York wasn't so kind. Three juries deadlocked on racketeering and murder charges against the younger Gotti, who insists he got out of his dad's business a decade ago.

The new racketeering charges unveiled Aug. 5 in Tampa allege cocaine trafficking and the murders of three New York men.

In a New York Daily News story two days later, Kasman was called the "secret weapon" for Florida prosecutors. "Don't forget about Lewis Kasman, and don't underestimate his value," a law enforcement source told the newspaper.

Kasman, who is in protective custody, has said he flipped after the death of the elder Gotti because other members of the Gambino family tried to steal from him.

Kasman, who gave the elder Gotti a no-show job in New York's garment district, served six months in prison in 1994 for lying to a grand jury for his boss. His testimony in the ADT trial has been called a sort of tryout for his Florida handlers.

"They want to use him in the Gotti Jr. case in Tampa. This is his big audition," Markus said.

Attorney Michael S. Pasano, a Miami shareholder with Carlton Fields who represents John Artuso, said Kasman is likely to say anything on the stand.

"I intend to aggressively cross-examine Mr. Kasman and demonstrate the many lies that Mr. Kasman himself agrees that he has committed over the years," Pasano said.

Pasano said all of Kasman's surreptitious taping never captured any of the defendants talking about ADT.

Markus said the prosecution strategy is simple: get Kasman to mention John Gotti and Gambino enough to make it stick.

"This case has nothing to do with the mob," he said. "It's silly."

John Pacenti can be reached at (305) 347-6638.

Reader's comments

Frank C said: It takes a lot of courage to do what Lewis Kasman is doing. He was abused and disrespected by jealous Gambino's AFTER Gotti Sr passed away, by Gotti's brother Richard and others. They attempted to extort \$\$\$\$ from him on numerous times. What a shame for a guy sooo LOYAL for over 20 years. Typical Mafia.... Money is the god! Had Gotti Sr lived NONE of this would have happened. Gotti loved Kasman more than his own kids!! I fell terrible for Kasman and wish him well! He took care of John SR 24-7... Kasman is one of the BEST! I blame JoJo Corozzo for all this..... Sept. 5 at 5:26 a.m.

Brian Landau said: I completely agree with FRANK C., After Gotti Sr., died the vultures came out after Kasman. They wanted Gotti's money and his. They disgraced their Boss upon his death. Kasman needed to survive and the law was the only way. So true of the MAFIA! Its all about Money - loyalty the mafia has none! Kasman even PAID for the Funeral. The "family" refused. Kasman did the right thing, the gangsters betrayed him! Sept. 5 at 11:14 a.m.

Your Name:

Comments: