

PRESS RELEASE

14 Defendants, Including Leaders of the Colombo Organized Crime Family, Plead Guilty to Various Felony Charges

Friday, July 14, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York

Defendants Included the Colombo Crime Family's Underboss, Consigliere and Captains

Earlier today, at the federal courthouse in Brooklyn, Vincent Ricciardo, also known as "Vinny Unions," a captain in the Colombo crime family of La Cosa Nostra, pleaded guilty to racketeering related to his extortion of a high-ranking official of a Queens-based labor union (the "Labor Union"), loansharking, and conspiracy to commit money laundering. Ricciardo is the last of the defendants indicted in 2021 and 2022 in connection with various offenses committed by members and associates of the Colombo crime family involving extortion, money laundering conspiracy, drug-trafficking, fraud and loansharking offenses. Previously, Benjamin Castellazzo, the Colombo family underboss, pleaded guilty to money laundering conspiracy and Ralph DiMatteo, the Colombo consigliere, pleaded guilty to racketeering involving extortion and money laundering conspiracy. Colombo family captains Theodore Persico, Jr., who was slated to become the crime family's next boss, and Richard Ferrara also pleaded guilty to racketeering. Other defendants convicted of racketeering included Colombo family soldier Michael Uvino and associates Thomas Costa and Dominick Ricciardo.

In addition, various employee welfare benefit plan brokers and providers, including Albert Alimena, Joseph Bellantoni, and Erin Thompkins, pleaded guilty to health care fraud conspiracy stemming from their agreement with Colombo family members to divert benefit funds to the Mafia family. The guilty pleas took place before United States District Judge Hector Gonzalez.

Breon Peace, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, announced the guilty pleas.

"Today, there can be no doubt that the Colombo crime family has been decapitated as a result of the guilty pleas by its leadership and other facilitators of lucrative schemes," stated United States Attorney Peace. "This Office, and the outstanding prosecutors, Special Agents, and detectives responsible for this significant blow are nevertheless mindful of the resilience of organized crime and we will not relent in our efforts to dismantle, disrupt, and disable this destructive menace in our communities."

Mr. Peace expressed his appreciation to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, New York Field Office (FBI), the New York City Police Department, the U.S. Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration and Office of the Inspector General, the Nassau County Police Department, the New York City Department of Investigation, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice's Organized Crime and Gang Section for their invaluable assistance in the investigation.

According to earlier court filings and facts presented during the guilty plea proceedings, the defendants and their co-conspirators committed a variety of crimes – including extortion, loansharking, fraud, and drug-trafficking – to enrich themselves and to promote the continued operation of the Colombo organized crime family of La Cosa Nostra. The Colombo family's administration, including boss Andrew Russo (who passed away during the pendency of the case), underboss Castellazzo and consigliere DiMatteo, as well as captains Persico, Ferrara, and Vincent Ricciardo, agreed to use extortionate means, including threats of bodily harm, to force the official to give over a portion of his salary and, eventually, to take decisions at the Labor Union and with its affiliated healthcare benefit fund (the "Health Fund") that would enrich the Colombo crime family's administration, including attempts to force the trustees of the Health Fund to select vendors who were associated with the Colombo crime family and handpicked by some of the defendants. The crime family's administration sought to divert more than \$10,000 per month from the Health Fund's assets to the Mafia.

In addition, Castellazzo, DiMatteo, Persico, Ferrara, Ricciardo, and Uvino joined with defendants Alimena, Thompkins, and Bellantoni to devise a scheme to launder money from Health Fund contracts and vendor payments. These defendants attempted to re-bid Health Fund vendor contracts for claims administration, pharmaceuticals, and other health services to persons and companies affiliated with Bellantoni, and to select a company run by Alimena as the Health Fund's third-party administrator.

Bonanno crime family soldier John Ragano, who was also known as "Bazoo" and the "Maniac," also led a scheme to issue fraudulent workplace safety training certifications

from two occupational safety schools he purported to operate in Long Island. Rather than provide workplace safety trainings required to obtain Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certification, Ragano along with John Glover and Domenick Ricciardo, falsified paperwork submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor and other government agencies which represented that hundreds of workers had completed construction safety training courses when they had not. Instead, various defendants used Ragano's schools to conduct meetings involving members of La Cosa Nostra and to store illegal drugs and fireworks. In November 2022, Ragano pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit fraud in connection with a means of identification. He was sentenced in April 2023 to 57 months' imprisonment. In December 2022, Domenick Ricciardo pleaded guilty to racketeering and was sentenced in June 2023 to 28 months' imprisonment.

When sentenced, Castellazzo, DiMatteo, Ferrara, Martino, Persico, Vincent Ricciardo, and Uvino each face up to 20 years in prison. Costa faces up to 30 years in prison. Glover faces up to 15 years in prison. Alimena, Bellantoni, and Thompkins face up to 10 years in prison.

The government's case is being handled by the Office's Organized Crime and Gangs Section. Assistant United States Attorneys James P. McDonald, Devon Lash, Michael W. Gibaldi, and Andrew Reich are in charge of the prosecution.

The Defendants:

ALBERT ALIMENA

Age: 69

Pompano Beach, Florida

JOSEPH BELLANTONI

Age: 41

Massapequa, New York

BENJAMIN CASTELLAZZO (also known as "Benji")

Age: 85

Manahawkin, New Jersey

THOMAS COSTA

Age: 54

West Islip, New York

RALPH DIMATTEO

Age: 68

Merrick, New York

RICHARD FERRARA

Age: 61

Brooklyn, New York

JOHN GLOVER

Age: 64

Queens, New York

VINCENT MARTINO

Age: 45

Medford, New York

THEODORE PERSICO, JR. (also known as "Teddy")

Age: 59

Brooklyn, New York

JOHN RAGANO (also known as "Bazoo" and the "Maniac")

Age: 61

Franklin Square, New York

DOMENICK RICCIARDO

Age: 57

Franklin Square, New York

VINCENT RICCIARDO (also known as "Vinny Unions")

Age: 77

Franklin Square, New York

ERIN THOMPkins

Age: 55

Franklin Square, New York

MICHAEL UVINO

Age: 57

Garden City, New York

E.D.N.Y. Docket No. 21-CR-466 (S-1) (HG)

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