



Newsday Photo by Walter del Toro

Father Nirrengarten leaves courthouse

Head of Hope House Charged With Fraud

Hampton Bays—The priest who runs Suffolk County's only in-patient drug addiction treatment facility was arrested yesterday on welfare fraud charges.

Detectives attached to District Attorney Aspland's office said they arrested the Rev. Andrew Nirrengarten at about 9:30 AM at his living quarters at Hampton Bays Hope House Inc., after a four-month investigation of complaints from the county social services department and from unidentified former residents of Hope House about missing welfare checks.

Father Nirrengarten, a 34-year-old Catholic priest, was arraigned before Southampton Town Justice Paul H. Smith on nine counts of second-degree forgery, nine counts of criminal possession of forged instruments, two counts of filing false documents, one count of third-degree grand larceny and eight misdemeanor charges of petty larceny. Father Nirrengarten was released in his own recognizance and was ordered to return Oct. 24 with a lawyer.

On Leave

Spokesmen for the Catholic Diocese of Rockville Centre said Father Nirrengarten had been on unauthorized leave from his duties as assistant pastor of St. Rosalie's Church in Hampton Bays since June 1970. But Father Nirrengarten denied last night that the leave was unauthorized.

Investigators said that Father Nirrengarten was accused of signing welfare checks made out to Hope

House residents and depositing the money in the house account, and of telling two Nassau County residents to report a Smithtown address in order to qualify for public assistance in Suffolk.

Only three of Hope House's 25 residents were aware of the arrest yesterday afternoon, and they said the checks in question had been sent to nine residents who "dropped out" of the center before their checks arrived. Residents on welfare, they said, generally agreed to sign their checks over to Father Nirrengarten to cover house expenses.

'It's Not Wrong'

"Technically, by law, he's wrong—by law," said Edward Wells, 19, of Huntington. "But the way I look at it, he's not. For me, personally, being in this house for more than a year, it's not wrong morally or socially." Wells, a former addict, is a coordinator at Hope House.

Two other Hope House residents, Arthur Calissi, 26, of Bethpage and Larry Brown, 21, of Huntington, supported Wells' defense of Father Nirrengarten. The three said they thought the complaints had been filed by program "dropouts" seeking revenge.

After talking to his attorney last night, Father Nirrengarten said he knew nothing about the complaints until his arrest yesterday.

Lawrence Kennedy, executive director of the Suffolk County Narcotics Control Commission, said the county had granted Hope House \$12,000 April 1, but stopped payment at \$9,700 in July. He would say only that "The program was not satisfactory." Father Nirrengarten said last night that he had been given no explanation for the cancellation.

Mob Probers Subpena 7 on LI

By Joe Demma, John Cummings and Tom Renner

At least seven more Suffolk County residents, including two reputed Cosa Nostra figures, were subpoenaed yesterday as Brooklyn District Attorney Eugene Gold, reportedly seeking 60 crime figures in Nassau and Suffolk Counties, pushed his investigation onto Long Island.

Officials from Gold's office, accompanied by Suffolk detectives, arrived in the county yesterday with at least 10 subpoenas for the forthcoming grand jury investigation, but were unable to find all their men. Among those served, according to law enforcement sources, were Michael LaBarbara, a convicted loan shark and Colombo crime family associate, and Salvatore (Sonny Black) Montella, described as a former associate of John (Sonny) Franzese.

Officers refused to divulge the names of the others either already subpoenaed to testify or who are still being sought, although one Suffolk law-enforcement source said that Gold has a total of about 60 subpoenas for organized crime figures in both Suffolk and Nassau Counties—where a separate investigation will be forthcoming. Two public officials, Islip Republican Chairman Anthony Pace and Justin McCarthy, deputy director of marine affairs in that town, have already been subpoenaed. But the Suffolk source said they do not believe that any more public figures will be summoned.

Nassau District Attorney Cahn said yesterday that Gold had provided him with some information that he will present to a grand jury shortly. He declined to elaborate.

According to New York police sources, the 55-year-old LaBarbara was among many persons photographed at the Carnarsie trailer site that had been under surveillance by Gold, and which the district attorney has described as a headquarters for organized crime activity.

Sources said that LaBarbara was photographed at the site when he visited Paul Vario, another organized crime figure. And they added that Gold was checking into a previous attempt by Vario to allegedly shake down bars and taverns along Jericho Turnpike in the Commack area.

The attempt reportedly brought the Vario faction into a clash with associates of convicted hoodlum Julie Klein, also operating in the area at the time, but according to law enforcement sources, police intelligence agents went to the area and averted violence.

LaBarbara, who last gave a Holtsville address, has been convicted in Suffolk of loansharking and has a record of 36 arrests, including convictions for possession of a gun and operating a still. Montella, 42, who has given a Bay Shore address, has been charged with participating in a \$126,000 theft from a Huntington department store. He has been described as an associate of Franzese, a convicted mobster.

In a further development in the Brooklyn investigation, Gold announced yesterday that Joe Sternfeld, described as chauffeur and bodyguard for mobster Thomas (Tommy Ryan) Eboli, who was murdered last July, has been indicted on a first-degree perjury charge in connection with his account of the shooting.

Eboli was shot to death after leaving a house in the Crown Heights area of Brooklyn where he had been visiting a girl friend Gold said.

Inquiry Irks Some DAs

Riverhead—Brooklyn District Attorney Eugene Gold's investigation of organized crime is causing anxious ripples among some of his fellow prosecutors in the metropolitan area, including Suffolk County District Attorney Aspland, who has taken a specific step to avoid conflicts in seeking suspects.

Under Aspland's directions, Assistant District Attorney Sam Fierro, head of the rackets squad, is seeking the names of organized crime figures Gold wants to subpoena in this county. Sources close to the office say Fierro is upset that the Brooklyn probe might interfere with his local investigation if the same crime figures or operations happen to be involved. He is expected to receive the list some time today.

In Nassau County, however, District Attorney Cahn said that Gold had cooperated with his office

and that the Brooklyn surveillance "has uncovered some information" concerning Nassau that Cahn will present soon to a grand jury.

But not all other public prosecutors were as satisfied as Cahn. A spokesman said that Queens District Attorney Thomas Mackell has no complaints on the massive Brooklyn operation, but a source close to Manhattan District Attorney Frank Hogan said that Hogan's office was "very unhappy" about certain Gold disclosures.

The source said that several electronic devices Hogan is using in his organized-crime investigation have suddenly become "inoperable." Gold's public disclosures of surveillance devices that he employed, the source said, jeopardizes such investigations in general. "To say and show how and where, and in what manner, you plant these things [bugs] is insane," the source said.