

# Scam Case Witness Challenged

By Carolyn Colwell

The credibility of a key government witness, Lawrence Iorizzo, may be a major factor in a federal judge's decision to grant or refuse bail for Michael Franzese and two co-defendants, according to arguments in federal court yesterday.

After listening to five days of testimony, U.S. District Court Judge Eugene Nickerson said he will decide this week whether to release Franzese, 34, of Brookville and Brentwood, Calif., Frank Cestaro, 46, of North Bellmore, and Frank Castagnaro, 40, of Amityville before their April trial.

They were among nine defendants charged last month in a 99-count indictment with defrauding banks, finance companies and other major corporations of more than \$5 million.

To bolster the government's case

that there is a danger that Franzese would obstruct justice if he is released, the prosecution has introduced testimony that Franzese had threatened the lives of his father's parole officer and Iorizzo's son. Iorizzo, a former president of Vantage Petroleum, is a convicted felon and is cooperating with the government.

But the defense's testimony suggested that Iorizzo's sole concern was obtaining immunity.

In a written statement introduced yesterday, Frank Campione, a colleague of Franzese's, said Iorizzo had told him, "the FBI made him an offer that if he would give up Sonny and Michael Franzese he could walk away from everything."

"Sonny" is John Franzese, Michael's father, who has been identified in U.S. Senate hearings as a crime family cap-

tain. Michael Franzese has denied any involvement with organized crime.

Yesterday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Jerry Bernstein challenged the believability of Campione's signed statement about Iorizzo's comments, questioning why he didn't say the same thing from the witness stand during the hearing, since Campione had been watching the proceedings.

Bernstein also questioned the veracity of other signed statements from friends and colleagues of Franzese's, which were presented as evidence yesterday by defense attorney John Jacobs.

Joseph Yorizzo, 42, of Oyster Bay, said in a statement that Iorizzo often told him that his motto is, "Whenever you are caught in a lie tell a bigger lie." Yorizzo and Iorizzo are codefendants with Franzese in a Florida case

involving charges of gasoline and fuel-oil tax fraud.

Joann Lombardo, the wife of Sebastian Lombardo, whom Bernstein described as a "figurehead" for Franzese in oil and gas companies, said Iorizzo told her shortly after his conviction, "not to worry, nothing is going to happen. I'm not going to jail."

That same month, Iorizzo fled to Panama. He testified that he left with a phony passport that Cestaro helped obtain for him. But Cestaro's attorney, Marion Seltzer, tried to damage the credibility of that testimony yesterday with a signed statement from Iorizzo's secretary, Irene Chlandra.

Iorizzo had testified that Chlandra was present when he paid Cestaro \$5,000 for the fake documents. In her statement, Chlandra said she wasn't there.



Photo by Jonathan Fine

## Driver Killed in 5-Vehicle Collision in Bellmore

Police officers inspect wreckage resulting from a five-vehicle accident that killed one man and injured three others slightly at Jerusalem Avenue and Newbridge Road, Bellmore, at 7:30 a.m. yesterday. The

dead man was identified as Ronald Levantini, 43, of 108 Morningside Dr., Westbury, who police said was the driver of a car involved in a collision with a van. Three other cars were hit by the two vehicles.

## Starry, Starry Nights to Be More So at the Planetarium

By Robert Fresco

Centerport — The stars will be brighter at the Vanderbilt Planetarium by the end of the summer, but for the next six to eight months there will be no stars at all.

The sky theater will close after Sunday's show for the first major renovation since it opened in June, 1971, said director Mark Levine. "The planetarium machine has been grinding for 15 years," he said. "There are odd sounds coming out of it."

There are also brown stains on the dome onto which the machine projects stars and planets. "We've lost all the faint stars," Levine said. Planetarium visitors now are unable to see about 2,000 of the 11,369 stars the machine projects, and the visible stars have lost up to 40 percent of their brightness, he said. The dome needs repainting to bring out their full brightness, he said.

The planetarium will also replace all of its 234 theater seats, many of which are broken, and will

install new carpeting. Work will be finished between July and September, Levine said.

Officials of Suffolk County, the owner of the Vanderbilt Museum, which contains the planetarium, say the \$250,000 refurbishing job will be paid for from capital-budget money approved by the county legislature last year.

Other needed work will be done at the museum at the same time, said Vanderbilt acting executive director Joseph Famighette. The crumbling bell tower over the main gate of the Vanderbilt mansion will be repaired. So will paneling in Mrs. Vanderbilt's bedroom and dressing room. Those two jobs, which will cost an additional \$280,000, will be completed by May 1, the regular spring opening day for the museum, Famighette said.

During the repairs, the planetarium's observatory will remain open for groups of visitors. In addition, Levine and three other staff members will travel around Long Island, lecturing and showing slides to school classes, the elderly and other groups.

## Fatal Fire Spread From A Kitchen

Massapequa — A fire that killed two elderly women in their apartments here Sunday started in the kitchen of the woman who lived downstairs, burned for more than three hours and engulfed the second victim's upstairs apartment in thick smoke, Nassau County and city fire officials said yesterday.

Lillian Lobo, 71, a retired executive secretary with a New York City manufacturing firm, and Catherine Keating, 84, a widowed housewife who moved to Long Island from Brooklyn four years ago, were residents at the Point Of Woods complex at 30 Lamplighter Lane. They were pronounced dead shortly after 10 p.m. Sunday at Brunswick Hospital Center in Amityville.

Bob Doran, a Nassau County fire marshal's official, said investigators had not determined after a day-long investigation yesterday exactly how the fire started in Lobo's downstairs apartment. Massapequa Fire Chief John Deleomo estimated damages to the apartments at \$30,000.

Doran said Lobo lived alone and associated with few neighbors in the 214-unit complex. As a result, investigators were not able to learn about her habits or what kind of material might have ignited in her kitchen. "There is nothing we can lock onto," Doran said. "There is no question that this was an accidental fire. Exactly what that accident is, we haven't been able to nail down yet."

He said he found that one burner on the electric stove in Lobo's apartment had been left on. In a frying pan on a second burner was an uncooked hamburger. Lobo was found on the floor of the apartment, between the living room and dining room, in a position indicating she was trying to flee.

"She was burned on her hands, arms, face and head. That puts her in the fire area, in the kitchen," he said. "The sequence of events after that is what we're still after."

Keating was found sitting in a rocking chair in her living room.

Doran said he thought both women had died from smoke inhalation. He was still awaiting confirmation late yesterday from the Suffolk County medical examiner. Dr. Stuart Dawson, Suffolk County's deputy medical examiner, completed autopsies of the victims yesterday but refused to release results to anyone other than family members.

Lobo's sister, Elizabeth Egan of Merrick, said Lobo had commuted to jobs in New York City for 50 years. "She was a very fine person, a very good-looking girl and a handsome woman," Egan said.

Keating's son Donald, from Stamford, Conn., said that his mother had been a widow since 1970 and that her health was failing. He said she had moved from Brooklyn to the apartment in Massapequa in 1982 to be closer to her daughter, Delores Shea, who lives in Massapequa Park.