

drama plays out in court

■ **Son testifies** against dad, accused mobster

■ **Relatives take sides,** pass around blame

BY JOHN RILEY

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In a trial that is rapidly turning into a mob family soap opera, ex-hoodlum John Franzese Jr. testified yesterday that he decided to become an informant and tape his father, reputed Colombo family underboss John "Sonny" Franzese, because he needed a way to turn his life around.

"I thought it was the right thing to do," said Franzese, 50, a reformed cocaine addict who grew up in Roslyn in the 1970s, as his 93-year-old father clutched a cane and watched intently from the defense table. "I thought it was a chance to make up for what I had done in my life."

The father, a big-name mob guy since the days when hoods hobnobbed with the likes of Frank Sinatra, limped out for frequent bathroom breaks while his son — a large metal cross dangling on his chest — walked prosecutors through secretly recorded tapes that caught his dad plotting to extort strip joints and discussing political arrangements for a club in Babylon.

The testimony in federal court in Brooklyn, however,



FBI surveillance shows accused mobster John "Sonny" Franzese and his son John Franzese Jr.

took a backseat to the drama outside. Cristina Capobianco Franzese, of Selden, defended her son's betrayal of her estranged husband, while brother Michael Franzese — himself an ex-mobster who has become a minister — condemned the testimony against blood and sympathized with his father.

"The family's taking it hard," said Michael Franzese. "I feel worst for my father. He always had a soft spot for his kids, so this is hard, very, very hard."

But Cristina Franzese leaped to her son's defense, describing her 52-year marriage as a disaster for her children, in which mobster father

Sonny cheated on her and put gangland burdens on young sons who didn't want them while he spent more than half of his adult life in prison.

John Franzese Jr., on the witness stand, said that growing up in Roslyn, he had lots of money — a new car every year, an "exorbitant" wardrobe of clothes, and a reputation as the richest kid in school. He said at 18 he began hanging out at gang social clubs and his father started using him to ferry messages.

"I'm really on my son's side because he did not have a life," his mother said, describing him as a "very compassionate" person who graduated from St. John's with top honors be-

fore getting hooked on drugs — a habit she said that did not keep his father from exposing him to bars and drug dealers.

He had to turn on the "terrible life" of his father to find inner "peace," she said.

"I'm not testifying against Dad," he told her. "I love Dad. I'm testifying against our life and our lifestyle."

Christina Franzese, 75, took her own potshots at her husband, calling him a cheapskate and philanderer. She voiced one note of sympathy: "I wouldn't like to see anyone die in prison."

Sonny Franzese, Joseph DiGorga of Oceanside and two others are charged in the racketeering conspiracy.

Bellone subject of evidence tape

BY DENISE M. BONILLA

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Several years ago, Babylon Town Supervisor Steve Bellone and other town officials walked into a business under construction in Copiague and met a man named Joe DiGorga. They had heard from residents concerned that the restaurant DiGorga was opening on Great Neck Road was going to be a strip club.

"I flipped out immediately," Bellone said. "I said, 'There is no way you're going to open up a strip club here ... I will fight you to the end.'"

This is a far cry from the way DiGorga described interactions with Bellone on a tape

played yesterday in the federal racketeering trial of John "Sonny" Franzese, on which he claimed Bellone was helping him open the business.

Outside the courtroom, DiGorga told a reporter his comments about Bellone were all made up.

On the tape, made in 2005 by Franzese's son John, who is a witness against his father in the trial, DiGorga is heard discussing his plans to open a strip club in Copiague.

DiGorga, on the tape, brags that he got help getting a certificate of occupancy from Bellone. "He pushed me through, he pushed me like crazy," DiGorga says. Asked if Bellone expected anything

in return, DiGorga laughed and says, "He's expecting."

Outside the courtroom after the tape was played, a Newsday reporter asked DiGorga about his comments on the recording. He said they were "B.S." designed to relieve pressure he was getting from his associates to get the club opened. He said Bellone did him no favors, and opposed efforts to get approval for topless dancers.

In fact, town officials said, the business never was issued a certificate of occupancy.

"Steve made it very tough on us," DiGorga said. "I was blustering. ... Steve did more to keep me closed than to help me open."

Federal prosecutors refused to comment yesterday.

In an interview yesterday, Bellone said he was never contacted by the FBI about the recording.

Ann Marie Jones, Babylon's commissioner of planning and development and one of the officials on the walk-through with Bellone and DiGorga, confirmed the town and Bellone were tough on DiGorga. She said they were concerned because of revitalization plans for downtown Copiague.

Bellone said news of the recording was surprising but not a big concern. "I don't think anyone would be shocked to hear about one mobster lying to another." *With John Riley*

Parents get lessons in anti-gang prevention

BY JENNIFER MALONEY

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Images of Suffolk County teens flashed on a screen in the Connetquot High School auditorium last night: groups of kids dressed all in blue or red, flashing hand signs and bearing tattoos.

They are the faces of Long Island gangs.

"If your child has a new group of friends and they are all wearing the same color clothing," then they might be part of a gang, Suffolk Police Sgt. David Dougherty warned about 100 parents in the audience.

The seminar on gangs and drugs, organized by the Town of Islip, comes as town residents — particularly in Brentwood and Central Islip — have rallied to fight escalating gang violence in their communities.

After a succession of shootings and killings earlier this year, residents began to speak out in public forums, demanding more police, a crackdown on graffiti and better resources for after-school programs.

Since then, Islip Town, Suffolk County and local civic groups have initiated a range of anti-graffiti programs. And more than a thousand people took to the streets on May 27 for a peace march through Brentwood and Central Islip.

"The gang situation is very bad," said Wunmi Green-Wright, a Central Islip resident and retired correction officer, who brought her three boys, ages 10, 11 and 13. "I wanted them to hear it from someone else as well. This is information they need to get out to every community."

Among the speakers last night were a special agent from the federal Drug Enforcement Agency, who listed a heartbreaking series of armed robberies and fatal car crashes related to drugs; and the parents of Natalie Ciappa, 18, who died of a heroin overdose in 2008.

Long Island law enforcement officials have intensified their anti-heroin efforts since the death of Ciappa, of Plainedge, whose overdose death brought attention to a problem touching nearly every community on the Island.

"Download parenting software," said Doreen Ciappa, Natalie's mother, who urged parents to disregard their child's privacy. "Search their car. Search their clothes," she said.