

Indictment unsealed in LA Coliseum contract probe

By Linda Deutsch
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES—A felony indictment unsealed Friday accused former executives and concert promoters of a scheme to embezzle millions of dollars from the historic Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum as the once-venerable site of Olympics, Super Bowls and political events was reduced to hosting rave concerts.

The 29-count, grand jury indictment released by Los Angeles County prosecutors alleges bribery, embezzlement, conspiracy and conflict of interest. It names two former Coliseum executives, two rave promoters and two other Coliseum contractors.

It claims that millions of dollars were stolen from the operations of the stadium that has been a landmark since the 1920s.

"My office has thoroughly investigated and will aggressively prosecute this public corruption case," District Attorney Steve Cooley said.

Among the events cited by prosecutors while opposing bail for the defendants was a drug-fueled rave where a young woman suffered an overdose and later died. However, the event was not part of the grand jury indictment.

Prosecutors claim the promoters were undeterred by the death and pressed for more raves, providing bribes to win access to the venue.

Four defendants appeared in court and a judge entered pleas of not guilty for them. Their attorneys have said they are scapegoats for mismanagement of the Coliseum.

Superior Court Judge Patricia Schnegg agreed to significantly reduce the original bail figures set for the men. She ordered them back for a hearing March 28.

At day's end, Todd DeStefano, assistant general manager for events, was being allowed to post \$1.2 million bail as was Pasquale Rotella, the owner of Insomniac Inc. They were expected to be released.

Reza Gerami, owner of Go Ventures Inc., a promoter of music events, also was held on \$1.2 million bail and Patrick Lynch, former general manager

of the Coliseum had his bail set at \$800,000.

Prosecutors said they had not yet presented their bail plans and would not be released immediately.

Two contractors named in the indictment were out of town and had not yet surrendered.

Lynch, DeStefano and Gerami were brought to court in blue jail uniforms with their hands cuffed.

Rotella, who was out of town when the others were arrested Thursday, flew to Los Angeles and surrendered in court. He was taken into custody.

Outside court, Rotella's lawyer Gary Jay Kaufman said his client is a legitimate businessman who "built a company from a garage into selling out football stadiums." He and other defense lawyers said their clients are innocent of any wrongdoing.

"We're going to fight back," said DeStefano's lawyer, Michael Nasatir. "This guy is innocent. We're going to show he's innocent. They're out of line."

Rotella's company staged the infamous Electric Daisy Carnival in 2010 at which a teenage girl took an overdose of Ecstasy and later died. The event led to cancelling other raves at the Coliseum.

"In the past, electronic music concerts, also known as raves, were generally conducted illegally, without permits and with rampant drug use," prosecutors said in a motion opposing bail reduction. "More recently, their promoters have managed to bring the events to conventional venues but have faced resistance from the public due to continued drug use and other safety issues."

The motion by Deputy District Attorney Max Huntsman said the promoters learned that "the best way to overcome such resistance is always to use an inside man."

He said the inside man was DeStefano, who provided them with access to the Coliseum and adjoining property at low rates. The documents submitted to the court claimed that the Coliseum lost \$2.5 million while DeStefano, Lynch, Gerami and Rotella made millions, with DeStefano receiving bribes.

In addition, the indictment alleged that Lynch had a side deal with the provider of maintenance services at the Coliseum for kickbacks of more than \$385,000.

The charges marked a low point in the storied history of the venue where Rafer Johnson carried the Olympic torch in 1984 and John F. Kennedy accepted the Democratic presidential nomination in 1960.

The Coliseum opened in 1923 and was the site of Olympics in 1932 and 1984. The 1959 World Series and Super Bowls I and VII also were held there.

Known for its distinctive peristyle arches and Olympic torch, the Coliseum has been seen in movies, commercials and was the locale of a mass conducted by Pope John Paul II during a papal visit. It can seat 93,000 people for football games.

It sits in Exposition Park, which also features the aged Sports Arena, museums, a science center, huge rose garden and other facilities and lawns.

It has fallen on hard financial times in recent years. The adjacent University of Southern California, which leases the property as an athletic games venue, is seeking to take over day to day operations of the property, owned jointly by the city, county and state.

The Coliseum has been the home field since the 1920s for USC, whose football team claims 11 national championships, 36 conference titles and frequently sets conference attendance records, sometimes packing in more than 90,000 fans for games.

Rotella's lawyer said his concert business will go on.

"The company has a robust leadership team in place implementing Mr. Rotella's vision and no events will be impacted," Kaufman said.

He said Insomniac has produced more than 250 music events for more than 2 million concertgoers in California, Nevada, Colorado, Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico.

Insomniac's premier annual event, Electric Daisy Carnival, is one of the biggest music festivals in the United States, he said.

LA council urges curbs on derogatory radio speech

From staff reports

LOS ANGELES—The Los Angeles City Council called on TV and radio broadcasters Wednesday to keep their hosts from spouting crude slurs, citing Rush Limbaugh's reference to a woman as a "slut" and KFI's John and Ken calling Whitney Houston a "crack ho."

The council voted 13-2 for a resolution urging Los Angeles stations to do "everything in their power to ensure that their on-air hosts do not use and promote racist and sexist slurs over public airwaves."

The resolution also states that it important for stations to hire more women and minorities.

The measure has no legal force and Councilman Richard Alarcon said its message would be "mild and weak" in comparison to the reach of radio. However, he and other council members argued that it was proper for the ethnically diverse city to speak out against what they called hate speech.

Government has no right to suppress "hateful, vile, despicable speech" but society should not tolerate it, Councilman Paul Krekorian said. "We can drown out that hatred with a loud chorus."

The measure was sponsored by three Black council members and supported by civil rights and minority media groups. It was broadened after originally naming only KFI-AM and its owner, Clear Channel, which carries Limbaugh and owns hundreds of stations nationwide.

Burbank-based KFI has 1.5 million listeners on any given weekday, the resolution said.

At the council meeting, speakers said the focus was on conservative radio shows such as Limbaugh's, accusing them of trading in crude stereotypes of Blacks, women and Latinos.

"It's ugly. It's violent. They're inciting others to violence," said Alex Nogales, head of the National Hispanic Media Coalition.

Messages and calls to Clear Channel and KFI seeking comment were not immediately returned.

The resolution specifically cites recent remarks by Limbaugh and KFI's John Kobylt and Ken Chiampou.

Limbaugh called law student Sandra Fluke a "slut" and a prostitute who wanted the government to subsidize her sex life after she urged lawmakers to consider the importance of contraception coverage in their discussion of national health care policy. He later apologized after several sponsors dropped his show.

KFI's "John and Ken" show was briefly pulled last month after the radio hosts referred to the late Whitney Houston as a "crack ho."

Calif. exec pleads guilty to tomato price-fixing

By Don Thompson
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO—A former California food company owner has pleaded guilty to racketeering in a national tomato price-fixing plot.

Frederick Scott Salyer entered the plea on March 23 in federal court in Sacramento. The 56-year-old is scheduled for sentencing July 10 and remains free on \$6 million bail.

Salyer was charged with bribing purchasing managers to buy tomato products from his company, Monterey-based SK Foods.

Prosecutors say he fixed prices and rigged bids for the sale of tomato products to McCain Foods USA Inc., ConAgra Foods Inc. and Kraft Foods Inc.

He pleaded guilty to two charges: racketeering and price fixing. The charges carry maximum 20-year prison sentences, although Salyer is expected to face four to seven years behind bars.

Prosecutors say 10 other food company representatives were convicted.

Man wrongly accused in Giants fan beating speaks

From staff reports

LOS ANGELES—A man who was wrongly arrested in the near-death beating of a Giants fan outside of Dodger Stadium said on March 22 that he deserves an apology from Los Angeles police.

In his first appearance since his release from a San Diego prison Saturday, Giovanni Ramirez told reporters he tried to stay out of trouble before his May 22 arrest.

"There was a point where I thought this kind of stuff only happens in movies... it felt like a giant conspiracy," said Ramirez, referring to the bits of evidence police gathered.

Ramirez was never charged with the beating of Bryan Stow. Ramirez's lawyer and family insisted that he had never been to Dodger Stadium, but police insisted for months that they had arrested the right man.

Ramirez was found to be in violation of his parole after a firearm was found at the home he was staying at, and he was sentenced to 10 months.

In late July, two other men were arrested in the beating and Ramirez was exonerated, but he remained incarcerated for the parole violation.

Ramirez said Thursday that his heart goes out to Stow's family and he wishes them the best as Stow continues to recover.

The paramedic from Santa Cruz suffered severe brain damage after he was attacked in the stadium parking lot on opening day last spring.

Asked by reporters if the LAPD owed him an apology, Ramirez said: "I do feel I deserve one, yes. Why? For being wrongfully accused."

El Camino College to sponsor Historically Black College Fair

From staff reports

TORRANCE—El Camino College will sponsor a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) Fair designed to help students choose and transfer to a four-year college or university.

The HBCU Fair is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. March 29 on the El Camino College Library Lawn. Representatives from Bennett College, Dillard University, Fisk University, Grambling State University, Howard University, Langston University, Stillman College, Texas Southern University, Xavier University, Texas College, Talladega College, Paine College, Prairie View A&M University, and others will be available to answer questions.

A workshop is also scheduled from 1 to 2 p.m. in the Distance Education Conference Room, focusing on the Transfer Admission Guarantee and the Transfer Admission Priority programs that El Camino College has with 10 historically black colleges and universities. The workshop will include information about the institutions, and former ECC students who have graduated from HBCUs will share their experiences.

El Camino College is the first California Community College to have transfer agreements with Historically Black Colleges and Universities. While on sabbatical in Spring 2010, El Camino College Counselor Elaine Moore developed the

transfer agreement program that simplifies the admissions process for ECC students seeking transfer to HBCUs.

The program is modeled after the agreements between El Camino College and the University of California and California State University systems. These agreements have assisted thousands of ECC students transfer successfully to universities within the state.

The HBCU transfer agreements specify the number of transfer units and specific grade point averages required for admission. Some of the institutions also offer priority consideration for housing and transfer scholarships. In addition, Hampton University, Talladega College, Albany State and Johnson C. Smith University will waive application fees. Transfer agreements are specific to each HBCU.

In addition, Moore developed a workshop last spring to share information about the HBCU agreements with counselors and administrators from other community colleges, and to show them how to start their own transfer agreements. Representatives from Santa Monica College, Long Beach City College, Fullerton College, and El Camino College Compton Center attended this informative workshop. ECC Trustee Ken Brown, a graduate of two HBCUs (Morehouse College and Clark Atlanta University), welcomed workshop participants.

For more information on transfer activities, log on to www.elcamino.edu/studentservices/co/transfer_services/ or call 310-660-3593, Ext. 3408.

CDBG

Continued from Page 1A

riers in low- and moderate-income areas throughout the city provides \$269,344 for the proposed projects.

The resolution allocates approximately \$651,614 to reconstruct various residential streets in low- and moderate-income areas.

"The Compton Fire Department put off purchasing new ambulances for the last two budget years," Grants Manager Renea Ferrell said. "One vehicle is 14 years old with high maintenance expense. The second ambulance was in an accident and has issues."

Compton Fireman Danny Gomez said he worries about the two faulty ambulances.

"Safety concerns arise when we transport the patient, two medics, the driver and a family member," he said. "The new ambulances have a higher weight capac-

ity."

The CFD did not receive any money when it applied for replacement ambulance grant money last year.

Compton Resident Lynn Boone brought the meeting to a halt during public comments when she accused Ferrell of reallocating money from accounts that did not exist, while actually taking money from CareerLink.

"If you do this, at least tell us the truth," she said.

Boone, a former CareerLink graduate, continued shouting her displeasure about the move after Councilwoman Janna Zurita, acting as mayor pro-tem, called for a five minute recess.

"I just spoke to City Controller Stephon Ajobiewe, and there is bad information out there," Arceneaux said. "The money exists, but the account numbers are inaccurate."

She urged residents with questions to

seek answers from the Council.

"At least when you leave today everyone will have the right information."

The Council has the authority to change the implementation of CDBG and CDBG-R funds. If the Council decides against allocating the funds towards the proposed projects, the city would have to spend general fund dollars for Crane Avenue and new ambulances.

"I think the best course of action is to address the accounting issues and vote on a proper resolution," Zurita said.

Interim City Manager Bryan Batiste reminded council members that no action means delays, but the group decided to review the matter with the corrections at its March 27 meeting.

"I can make the appropriate adjustments and bring it back," Ferrell said.

The next Compton City Council meeting is on Tuesday, April 3.