

'Supercop' takes center stage...

By MICHAEL MATUSEWICKI
It was a tale worthy of "The FBI," "Dragnet," or "Starsky and Hutch." Vincent Mazzara, 28, Michigan's own undercover supercop, spun a tale of intrigue and heroics earlier this week. Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson trotted out his ace investigator, Mazzara, to convince members of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' Personnel and Finance committees to continue funding for the prosecutor's Organized Crime Task Force.

WITH TELEVISION lights brightening the room and a gaggle of reporters in tow, Mazzara told of organized crime's infiltration of Oakland County. Organized crime, he said, has moved from Detroit to Oakland County, one of the wealthiest counties in the nation. Crime, he said, is pervasive and oftentimes disguised by legitimate businesses and persons in high government offices. He told of police officers and politicians on the take. He told of land schemes. He told of murder contracts and kidnap plots.

"IT'S LIKE RUNNING through a mudfield trying to chase organized crime," said the swarthy-skinned Mazzara, who is never photographed. "For every step I take, they take three."

"We're so far behind already. We really have to fight them now," he added, making his pitch for continued

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— Undercover agent
Vincent Mazzara

funding for the task force.

Organized crime in metropolitan Detroit is one of the most sophisticated operations in the country, he said. "You don't see bodies stuffed in the trunks of cars any more. You don't find too many people getting their legs broken."

"That kind of stuff still goes on in New York," he said.

Mazzara, who first began developing his reputation as premier undercover cop in a 1974 bust of a multi-million dollar Detroit drug ring, estimated there are only 300 persons in the United States associated with the Mafia and Cosa Nostra, the Big Two of organized crime.

Of those 300, he said, about 20 lived in the Detroit area and half of them live in Oakland County. He added that hundreds of legitimate Oakland County businesses are in some way tied to organized crime figures.

Detroit's organized crime network—its legal and legitimate enterprises—haul in about \$1 million a day, he estimated.

AS AN EXAMPLE of its pervasiveness in Oakland County, he said, organized crime related businesses and persons were buying up relatively cheap land around the Pontiac Silverdome.

He said the criminal elements had enough money, power and influence in Oakland County to win favorable zoning changes and make financial killings by selling the land to national hotel chains and other developers.

MUCH OF MAZZARA'S narrative focused on how he infiltrated the county's organized crime network for 14 months. His work, with support from the Michigan State Police and Federal Bureau of Investigation, resulted in the arrest of a Pontiac city commissioner, a Pontiac policeman, several labor leaders and more than 30 Oakland County residents.

He posed as a high-rolling Florida underworld figure and became increasingly involved in Oakland County schemes and scams.

It required a false driver's license, false credit cards and a bit of maneuvering in Washington D.C. He said crime records in the nation's capital had to be altered to make sure he would pass any inspections by corrupt law enforcement officials there.

Even his wife had to play a role in the drama. She was cast as Mazzara's girlfriend, an Eastern Airlines stewardess.

He told of being a hired killer and being part of a kidnap plot.

"It's nothing for them to have someone killed. It's nothing for them to have someone injured," he told a rapt audience.

He told of a fast-paced, high-living lifestyle complete with a new Cadillac, a Lincoln Continental, and \$2 cigars. There were 17-man surveillance teams, airplanes and helicopter chases.

"We touched organized crime in Oakland County," he said.

"You got to see who else it touches. There was a guy," he said, "who held an innocent job. It was an eight-to-five job. On weekends he operated a gambling operation."

UNLIKE NORMAL police work, Mazzara and Patterson said, the organized crime task force singled out known organized crime figures and tried to build cases against them.

That job, they said, becomes harder and harder as organized crime figures "insulate themselves further and further away from law enforcement officials."

... to save crime unit's budget

Eleven Oakland County Organized Crime Task Force investigators may find themselves booted out of their county courthouse offices come January.

The county board of commissioners, with an eye to setting next year's budget, are scrutinizing the much-publicized strike force. And L. Brooks Patterson, the county's fiery, brash prosecutor, is trying to convince the

board that its \$4-million investment is paying dividends.

As of Monday afternoon, many commissioners remained unconvinced.

THE TASK FORCE captured headlines as well as hoodlums several months ago when, in cooperation with the state police and the FBI, it arrested 39 persons in a Pontiac numbers racket.

However, District Court Judge Carl

F. Ingraham later dismissed the charges, saying the prosecution didn't obtain needed search warrants. Patterson is appealing the decision.

Patterson told the county board's personnel and finance committees this week that the task force has court cases and investigations pending concerning everything from passing bad checks to extortion and murder contracts.

WHILE PATTERSON may boast that the organized crime unit may have issued more search warrants than any other county law enforcement unit, some members of both committees refused to support the prosecutor's request.

Commissioner James Lanni (R-Royal Oak), one of Patterson's most ardent supporters, said he was afraid the strike unit would become a "gastape."

"I don't see the relationship between what you've done and organized crime," said Commissioner Alexander Perinoff (D-Southfield). Perinoff said that many of the task force's investigations had resulted in convictions on relatively minor counts. Those types of investigations, he suggested, might be better handled by other county police departments.

OTHER COMMISSIONERS argued that the task force could not possibly make a dent in the county's organized crime power structure.

They said it was too small and under-financed to make a significant difference. They added that they could not afford to fund it properly.

Instead of financing a county unit, some commissioners wondered if it might not be better to contribute to the state police or FBI.

"I just think we're spending too much money to investigate things that other people are investigating," Perinoff said.

"I look at the appropriation and I'm wondering if we shouldn't have our own strike force. Maybe we should put our money into a larger agency," added Commissioner Robert Gorsline (R-Milford).

THE SCRUTINY of the task force isn't likely to end in the near future.

Patterson's budget requests still have to go to his political rival, County Executive Daniel T. Murphy. Murphy's budget recommendations will come back to the board of commissioners for final approval. And turning any executive veto, a budget will be adopted before the new year.

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