

N.J. police sweep nets 41 alleged mobsters

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TRENTON, N.J.—Forty-one alleged members of six different organized crime families, including reputed DeCavalante crime boss John Riggi and the son of jailed mob chieftain Nicodemo Scarfo Sr., were charged yesterday in a massive sweep, officials said.

More than 150 state police fanned out across the state early yesterday to haul in the defendants, nabbed after a yearlong investigation based on information from turncoat George Fresolone, a "high-level" informant in the Scarfo organization, authorities said.

Those arrested included members of the Bruno-Scarfo, DeCavalante, Gambino, Colombo, Luchese and Genovese families.

Fresolone, who wore a concealed wire and recorded more than 400 conversations with the alleged mobsters, also recorded the initiation ritual of five members into the mob.

It is only the second time in history, and the

first time in New Jersey, that the secret Mafia initiation rite, which includes blood oaths, has ever been recorded, officials said.

About 30 of the defendants had been arrested by noon, authorities said. They were taken to the state police barracks in Totowa and were scheduled to be arraigned before Superior Court Judge Michael Degnan in Essex County.

Although the elder Scarfo, known as "Little Nicky," is serving a 69-year federal sentence in Illinois, authorities said their investigation revealed that he was still running his decimated criminal empire from his prison cell through his son, Nicodemo Scarfo Jr., 25.

Scarfo's South Jersey-Philadelphia operations have dwindled since the mob boss's convictions on extortion and murder, but authorities said that until Tuesday, a Scarfo faction had remained in business in northern New Jersey.

The imprisoned mob kingpin was channeling messages to his organization through his son during prison visits, said state Police Superintendent Col. Justin Dintino.

Among those charged yesterday were Anthony "Tony Buck" Piccolo, 67, of Collingswood, who Scarfo reportedly selected to oversee the day-to-day operations of his crime family, and Joseph "Scoops" Licata, 48, of Florham Park, the alleged "acting capo" of the northern Jersey faction of the Bruno-Scarfo enterprise.

"The Scarfo organization is in a state of disarray," Dintino said. "It's been greatly weakened by previous indictments, arrests and killings within the organization. This was the final stronghold with the Scarfo organization in the Newark area."

The young Scarfo's arrest will likely deal the elder Scarfo a devastating blow, Dintino said. Scarfo's son was "someone that he completely trusts" and whom he had envisioned as the future boss of the crime family.

"If the individuals arrested today... are convicted, I believe that the final nail in the Scarfo organized crime organization has been placed," Dintino said.

The taped conversations provided by Freso-

lone, who is now in hiding, provide intimate details of how the Mafia families cooperated with each other in setting up illegal activities and sharing the profits from such crimes as bookmaking, loansharking, illegal video machines, drug distribution, municipal corruption, union control, and violence, Dintino said.

Piccolo and Licata were charged with being leaders of organized crime and with racketeering.

Licata, who also was charged with illegal gambling offenses and theft by extortion, operated loansharking, bookmaking and extortion activities from the East Side Social Club in Newark, the criminal complaint said.

Riggi, 65, of Elizabeth, was charged with similar offenses, as well as witness tampering, bribery and hindering apprehension, and Scarfo Jr., of Scotch Plains, was charged with promoting gambling and racketeering.

The other defendants were charged with various offenses including conspiracy, racketeering and drug distribution.

Riggi already faces up to 65 years in prison for his conviction last month of violating federal labor laws and of extortion. He had been free on bail pending sentencing.

Fresolone tape-recorded conversations from August 1989 through late this summer, when he was initiated into the Bruno/Scarfo crime family at the Bronx hideout of Pasquale "Patty Specs" Martirano, a fugitive who recently died from liver cancer in a New Jersey hospital, officials said.

During the ceremony, Piccolo pricked the trigger finger of the initiates to draw blood, according to the 90-page affidavit of a state police detective who worked with Fresolone.

The initiates then individually recited an oath, "May I burn in hell if I betray my friends in the family," while they rubbed out a piece of paper set on fire in the palms of their hands.

A gun and a knife signified that members "live by the gun and die by the gun, live by the knife and die by the knife," the affidavit said.



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