

Licavoli--Old mob chief couldn't pass up a scam

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HIS BAGMAN is identified as Isadore (Izzy) Marion who has been seen carrying large amounts of cash from Las Vegas to Tucson, almost certainly money skimmed from the green felt tables.

Pete Licavoli's early years were violent and authorities credit him with killing at least 15 people between his days as the boss of the Purple Gang and 1950. Despite 38 criminal charges he has been convicted of only four crimes — bribing a Canadian border guard during his runrunning days; income tax evasion in the 1950s; contempt of Congress for refusing to appear before a rackets investigation and last year's stolen painting caper.

He's served exactly four years and six months behind bars due to a helpful combination of smart lawyers and forgetful witnesses, some of who got killed even before their memories were given a chance to get hazy.

IN 1951, Senator Estes Kefauver called Licavoli: "One of the most cold blooded and contemptuous characters to appear before our committee." Among various police agencies, he has been respectfully tapped: "A real hood, not a punk or a fringe man but really big-time, a real honest-to-God top hoodlum."

Harsh words haven't tagged Pete Licavoli or his three sons with any reputation as social pariahs, however. Pete has rubbed shoulders and been friends for years with a string of movie stars, among them Van Heflin, Gale Storm and Abbott and Costello. Lou Costello, in fact, was once the guest of honor at a party at Licavoli's former Tucson ranch, the Triple H.

Pete's sons also have showbiz connections. Ted Licavoli, a former heroin addict and speed freak now cured, used to be extremely close to Tia Farrow, sister of Mia Farrow, Frank Sinatra's former wife. Federal informants have also placed Ted with Dina Martin, daughter of singer Dean Martin who in turn has been seen drinking and talking with Mike Licavoli and Salvatore Spinelli, a Licavoli family mobster associate, during the Tucson Open golf tournament around 1972-73.



THIS IS THE Vesuvio Art Gallery in Tucson operated by Peter (Horseface) Licavoli Sr., a Mafia underboss who moved to Arizona in 1942.

AND AN informant, wired with a hidden microphone by federal authorities was talking to Horseface Licavoli in Phoenix. Licavoli was overheard telling the informant over drinks on Jan. 15, 1974, in Applegate's Olde English Pub that Senator Barry Goldwater was involved in undisclosed matters with the Licavolis, particularly real estate.

Pressed, Licavoli made it clear he was talking about the senator, not about his brother, Robert Goldwater. Senator Goldwater has denied being involved with the Licavolis.

An examination of a few key Licavoli activities illustrate the way he has managed to keep his well earned reputation as a mobster's mobster. When it comes to organized crime, the Licavoli family is as diversified as a modern conglomerate.

• — **RILLITO RACE TRACK.** In 1953, Licavoli, through associates, was able to buy a controlling share of stock in the Arizona horse

track. Licavoli himself bought only 30 shares, a token amount.

State authorities became suspicious and began checking into recent stock purchases. They found a woman named Ruth Illions, whose maximum earnings were no more than \$10,000 a year, but with \$100,000 worth of stock, bought with cash. Further investors turned out to be Licavoli's accountant, Victor Tronolone and the manager of Grace Rauch, Martin Fenster, plus three other close Licavoli associates.

In 1954 a young county attorney named Morris Udall exposed the Licavoli infiltration, noting in his report to the governor: "The control and ownership of a major entertainment enterprise might well be the first step in the pattern which leads eventually to strong arm tactics, protection rackets, corruption and all the attendant evils of organized crime."

• — **THE WILLIE BIOFF CASE.**

Undeterred by his failure to control Rillito, Licavoli gave his brother-in-law Joe Bommarito and another man \$300,000 to give to "Fat Willie Bioff," who handled entertainment at the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas. Bioff was a friend of the general manager of the IngleSide Turf Club in Phoenix and was to invest the \$300,000 for Licavoli in the track.

When there was no sign of action by Bioff, Licavoli demanded his money back. Bioff couldn't produce it because he'd lost most of it in the stock market. On Nov. 3, 1955, a New Orleans mob bomb expert, was seen in Phoenix. The next day, Bioff turned the ignition key in his pickup truck at his home and was blown up.

• — **GUNS AND MONEY.** On Dec. 27, 1973, Licavoli drove to the Phoenix airport and met an informant for the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms division of the Justice Department. The informant was wearing a hidden microphone.

In Licavoli's car the old man showed the informant nine counterfeit \$20.00 bills and one \$50.00 bill. He said he could supply up to \$20 million worth of money for a payment of a quarter the face value. The quality of the phony money was described as excellent.

Licavoli also said he could supply between 200 and 300 Israeli manufactured Uzi submachine guns, equipped with silencers if required. To demonstrate the quality of the goods, Licavoli produced from the glove compartment a custom made silencer for his personal weapon, a .22 caliber Baretta automatic that the old man keeps in the trunk of his car. Licavoli also offered the informant a supply of forged U. S. gold coins.

The ATF became involved in an internal squabble over how best to move on the case and flubbed the investigation.

• — **LUKEVILLE.** On the U.S. Mexican border west of Tucson is the town of Lukeville, once a desolate, dusty collection of ramshackle buildings now a bustling spot with a trailer park, a small airport, the Gringo Pass motel, gas station, stores and other amenities.

The town is on the way to and from no-

where. Geographically it lies right in the middle of the narcotics trail and authorities say that its sole reason d'être is dope. Licavoli once made strenuous efforts to buy the town, lock, stock, barrel and cantina. Today it is owned by an Alaska-based millionaire named Alfred Gay and the former owner who sold the town to Gay says Licavoli still owns some land just north of the Lukeville general store.

• — **HOBO JOES.** When the Mob muscled into a business in the old days, it used to be something like: "It'll cost ya a fin to keep da boys from breaking ya fingers. OK chump?"

Pete Licavoli did it with more finesse. He persuaded a restaurant owner named Herbert Applegate that what he needed to jazz up the decor in his Hobo Joe's restaurants were some paintings. Licavoli delivered the paintings roughly once a month, cheap mass produced art that cost Applegate \$2,500 for each shipment.

Soon, Applegate and his partners, including Robert Goldwater, had paintings stacked on top of paintings. Along with "art," some say Licavoli was also supplying Hobo Joe's with shrimp and potatoes.

LAW ENFORCEMENT groups, particularly the hard-hitting Phoenix police intelligence squad and the FBI, attempt to discern the thrust of Licavoli's business investments, by watching the people he meets.

One such series of meetings involved Licavoli and Robert Sikora, a friend of assorted hoodlums who rose overnight from short-order chef to boss man of the Bobby McGee's restaurant chain. The chain, which started in Phoenix, now has branches in Tucson, and throughout the west, south and even one in Honolulu.

Before Sikora opened his Tucson branch several years ago, he met with Licavoli. Also present was Dave Stevens, the interior designer with financial backing from Goldmar, the corporation headed by Robert Goldwater, brother of the Senator.