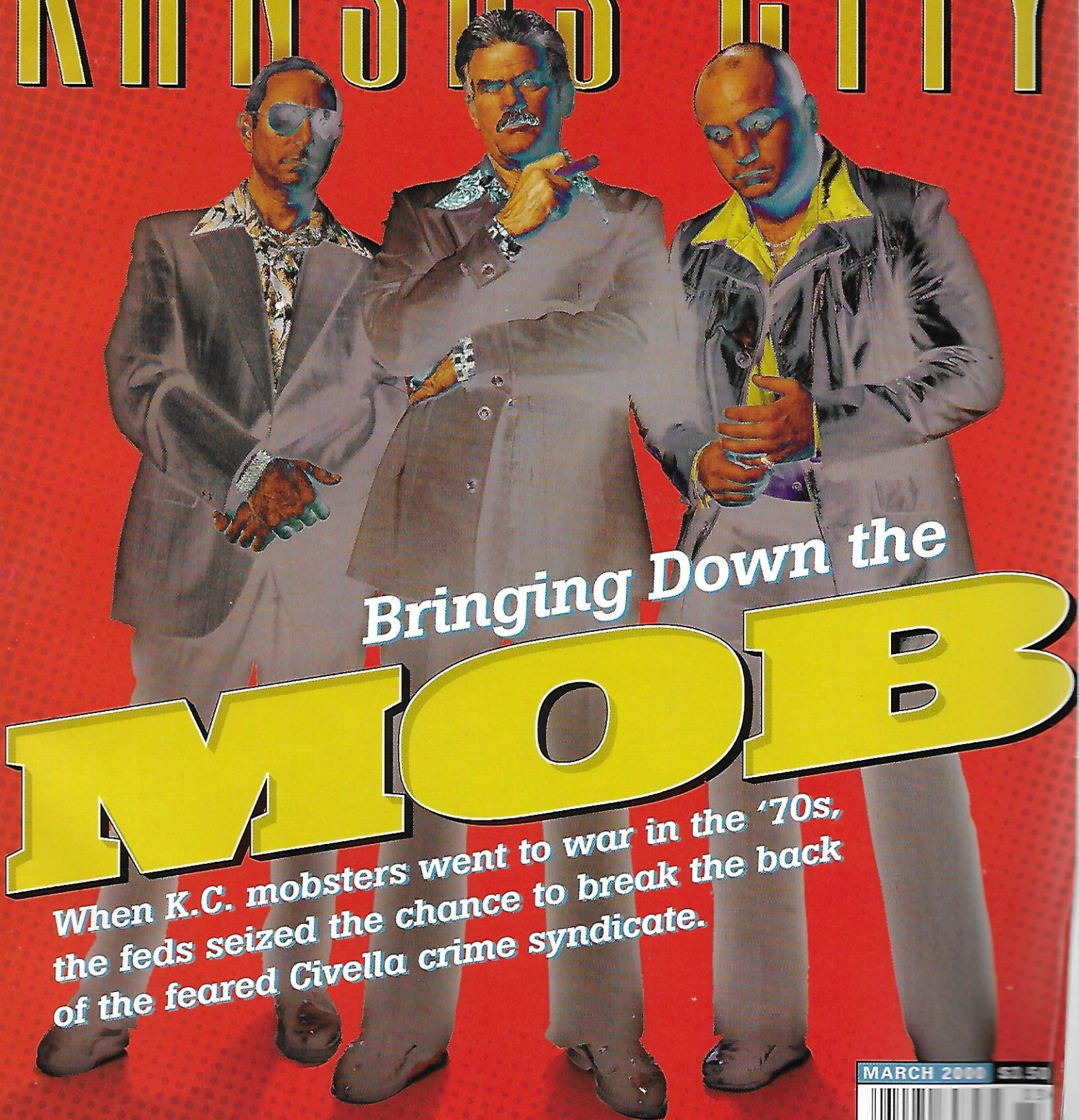


Oodles of Noodles Glover's Last Laugh Flint Hills Getaways

KANSAS CITY

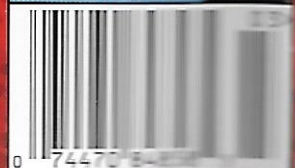


Bringing Down the

MOB

When K.C. mobsters went to war in the '70s, the feds seized the chance to break the back of the feared Civella crime syndicate.

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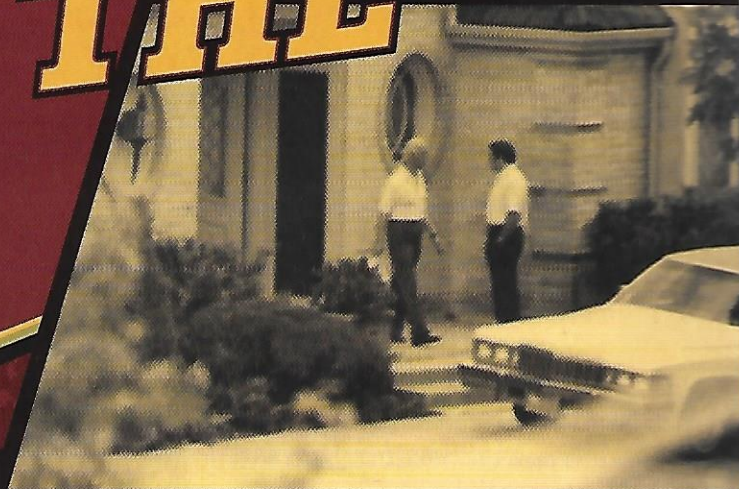
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When local mobsters went to war
in the '70s, it provided the
opportunity for the FBI to plumb
the depths of the local crime
syndicate and plant the seeds of
its demise. What followed helped to
undermine organized crime in America.

THE DECLINE &

Written by Bonar Menninger

TOP FALL OF THE



THE ONE-STORY COMMERCIAL BUILDING SITS EMPTY AND UNNOTICED on a high hill just east of downtown. In the distance below, the brick warehouses and turn-of-the-century merchant buildings that make up the old River Quay district stand huddled together, as if for protection, along the banks of the Missouri River. / The vacant building on Admiral

Boulevard is newer than those that populate the cityscape beneath it; its architectural style might best be described as mid-'70s franchisee. But it doesn't appear as if any tenant has been in the place for a while. The paint is coming up, the picture windows are cloudy and streaked, and a fake, chateau-like dropped roof — once meant to convey elegance—now only gives the structure a low, sinister look in the flat, dead light of a fading winter afternoon. / The sole hint of what the place used to be, of what transpired here, is a narrow strip on the building's corner painted in the red, white and green of the Italian Tri-color. Twenty-plus years ago, the building housed the Virginian Tavern, a popular Eastside joint. And it was here, on the night of May 16, 1978, that the wheels which would eventually crush the feared Kansas City Mafia slowly began to turn.

ABOVE: SURVEILLANCE PHOTO SHOWS NICK CIVELLA, LEFT, WITH BODYGUARD PETE TAMBURELLO, OUTSIDE CIVELLA'S NORTHLAND HOME.

Around 10 p.m., three masked men armed with shotguns burst into the tavern, picked out their targets and opened fire. Three patrons were struck. Michael Spero, a local Teamster official, was killed in the attack; his brother, Joseph, was hit in the arm, and a third brother, Carl, was paralyzed from the waist down, shot in the back as he fled into the street. The Speros had long represented a rival faction within

were powerless to stop the increasingly brazen depredations of the mob.

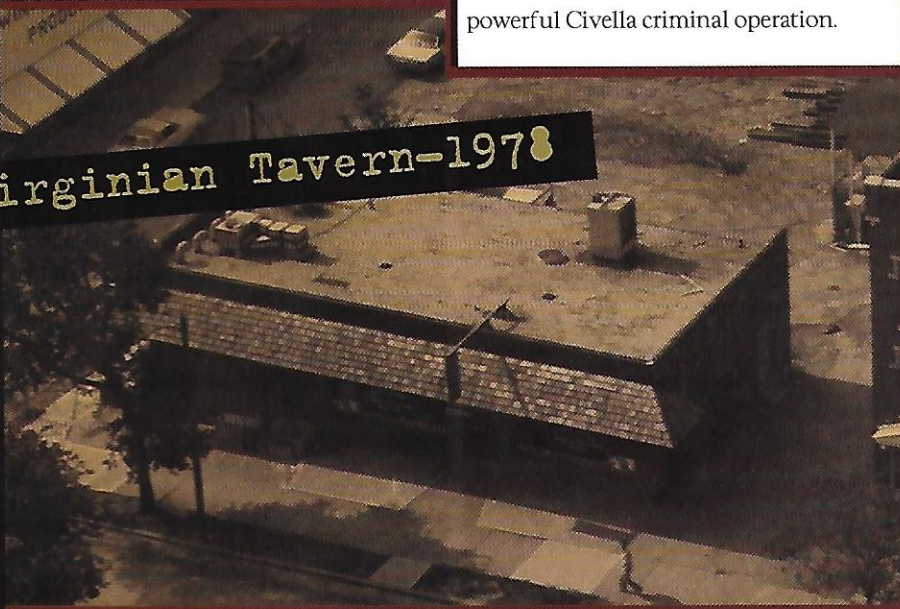
What investigators couldn't know as they sifted through the crime scene that night was just how close they were to turning the tide against the Outfit, as the Mafia was known in Kansas City. Thanks to electronic surveillance devices and wire taps put in place following the Spero shooting, FBI agents unexpectedly picked up information that would decimate the leadership and destroy the heart of the powerful Civella criminal operation.

Not only would authorities break the mob's 50-year chokehold on Kansas City, but in the process, they would land a major blow in the national fight against organized crime. Known as the Strawman Investigation, the probe and the convictions that flowed from it took down mob brass in Chicago, Milwaukee and Cleveland. Perhaps more importantly, Strawman revealed the long-rumored, but until then, never proven connection between Sicilian organized crime, the Teamsters Union and hidden mob interests in Las Vegas casinos.

And it demonstrated that it was possible to testify against the mob and live to tell the tale. Authorities believe the latter fact played no small role in subsequent decisions by a number of mobsters nationwide to roll over and break the *omerta*, or the Sicilian code of silence, through the late 1980s and 1990s.

"It was really a watershed event," said Michael DeFeo, a former attorney-in-charge of the Justice Department's Organized Crime Strike Force in Kansas City. DeFeo is now the assistant director in the Office of

Virginian Tavern-1978

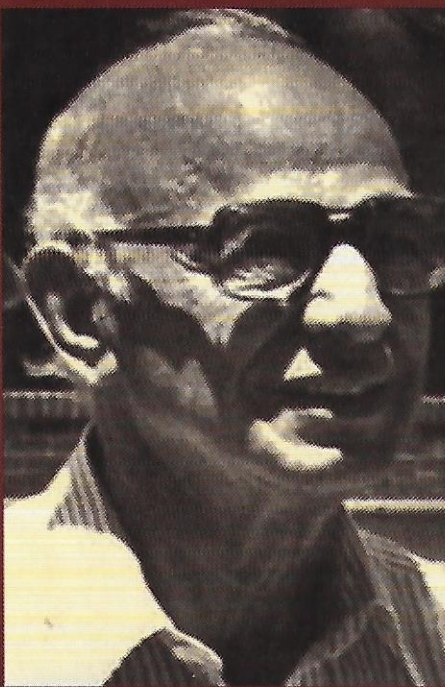


the local mob, and evidently, the time had come to take them out.

Although it was fairly evident to authorities who—or what—was behind the attack, they nonetheless seethed with frustration as they pulled up to the scene that night amid spectators gawking from the brownstones across the wide boulevard. For several weeks, informants had warned that a major hit was coming against a party or parties unknown. The FBI had responded by bugging the vehicles of several of the mob's known muscle guys. But the efforts had come up dry. And now the deed was done.

What made the attack even more galling was all that had preceded it. A string of underworld murders, arsons and bombings associated with a fight for control of the River Quay district had rocked Kansas City in 1976 and 1977. The extent of the mayhem had left many with the not-unreasonable impression that authorities

ABOVE: THE VIRGINIAN TAVERN WAS THE SCENE OF A SHOOTING IN MAY 1978 THAT KILLED TEAMSTER OFFICIAL MICHAEL SPERO AND WOUNDED TWO OF HIS BROTHERS. THE INVESTIGATION OF THE SHOOTING REVEALED EVIDENCE THAT PROVED CRUCIAL TO LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THEIR EFFORTS TO BREAK THE BACK OF THE K.C. MAFIA. BELOW: NICK CIVELLA, THE LONGTIME LEADER OF THE MOB LOCALLY, DIED IN 1983.



Professional Responsibility at the FBI.

"We established links between those entities, and if we didn't destroy the Kansas City organization, we certainly disrupted it for at least a generation. I think it was one of those rare cases where it was nearly a total success, based on a partnership between professional investigators and prosecutors."

Gary Hart, an attorney today who supervised the FBI's Organized Crime squad in Kansas City at the height of the probe, said electronic surveillance techniques developed during Strawman were central to the success of subsequent mob investigations around the country. "What was done in Kansas City was the benchmark," Hart said. "It had an enormous impact."

A complete rout of organized crime

locally seemed like a distant dream for federal investigators when the FBI set up an organized crime squad here in the early 1960s. Organized criminal activity had been pervasive and entrenched since the Pendergast era of the 1930s. By the '60s, the mob—spawned from the tight-knit Italian communities of the North End and Northeast—had extended its reach deep into the business community, area labor organizations and the local political scene. Labor racketeering, political graft, extortion, business infiltration, trafficking in stolen property, loan sharking and gambling all were the Outfit's stock in trade.

At the center of the local syndicate was Guiseppe Nicoli "Nick" Civella. Born in 1912 to Italian immigrant parents, he'd followed the path of crime from an early age. By 20, Civella had been arrested numerous times for car theft, gambling and robbery.

Thanks in part to his connections with gangsters in Chicago, Civella ascended to power in the late '50s following the murder of Charles Binaggio, then the reputed boss of Kansas City. Civella's status as the leader of the local syndicate was confirmed by his arrest at the infamous Appalachian Mafia convention in upstate New York in 1957.

The Kansas City mob was closely tied to Chicago, which exercised nominal control over the crime families west of the Mississippi River. But Civella's organization of 100 to 200 associates was no lightweight crew. Compared to other syndicates around the country, they were particularly close-knit, efficient and disciplined, according to investigators.

In the early days, the FBI spent most of its time gathering intelligence on the locals. "Mainly, we were trying to figure out who the players were and what they were doing," one key investigator said. "There was a tremendous learning process involved."

A decisive breakthrough for law enforcement came in 1968 when Congress approved the use of phone taps and bugs

against reputed organized crime figures, once probable cause had been established.

In late December 1969, a tap was placed on the phone at "The Trap," Civella's headquarters at 5th and Troost, otherwise known as the Columbus Park Social Club. The building was located in the heart of the brick-and-wooden walk-ups, modest Victorian homes and narrow streets of the old North End neighborhood.

Apparently, the Outfit had a problem.

DeLuna's Notes

12/5. 33 1976
Came by. CP took
ON to Noland's house to
visit with 22. They visited
about 2 hrs. "33" brought 6-5850.
ON setting aside 60 for deer
(5850 shirt) I presume 50 for
Mentis is included in the
two 65950s. I'll ask.
12/19/76 Sunday - deer picked-up
19 The above 60 at CP's house

CARL DELUNA'S HAND-WRITTEN RECORDS, INCLUDING THIS ENTRY FROM DECEMBER 1976, TRACKED FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS, DATES AND INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CASINO SKIMMING OPERATION.

The Kansas City Chiefs would play the Minnesota Vikings in the Superbowl on Jan. 11, 1970, and not surprisingly, nearly everyone in town was putting their money on the Chiefs. Because the betting wasn't balanced, a Chiefs victory would represent an unacceptable financial risk for the syndicate. As a result, Civella, in a conversation with a subordinate, was extremely interested to know about any progress in finding someone to whom the organization could lay off a major piece of the action.

Civella was indicted on gambling conspiracy charges as a result of the conversation and eventually convicted in 1975, although Oscar Goodman, a mob lawyer who today is mayor of Las Vegas, succeeded in keeping him out of jail until

1977 on technical arguments.

Despite the victory, the frustration authorities felt in their battle against organized crime here was apparent in the early 1970s. DeFeo, a native Kansas Citian, returned in 1971 to head up one of the nation's first Organized Crime Strike Forces. In a speech that year to the Kansas City Crime Commission, DeFeo condemned what he saw as widespread local indifference toward the mob.

"Kansas City is a community which, despite considerable publicity in local and national news media, has tolerated the influence of a powerful organized crime group for 50 years," he said. "Moreover, it is a community which even now, probably due to apathy and ignorance, is making no concentrated effort to rid itself of that influence. That, ladies and gentleman, is why our office is here."

The next several years marked a period of relative calm in the local underworld as Civella maneuvered to stay out of jail. But circumstances changed abruptly during the Bicentennial summer of 1976. Local mobster David Bonadonna was found murdered in the trunk of a car in late July. The River Quay War was on.

Bonadonna's son, Freddie, was a gregarious bar owner who'd played a leading role in the development of the River Quay, a collection of trendy eating and drinking establishments that bloomed in the River Market area in 1974. Despite his father's affiliation with the mob, Fred Bonadonna was not involved in organized crime. So when one of Kansas City's most feared mobsters, William "Willie the Rat" Cammisano Sr., turned to Fred for help in getting liquor licenses in order to bring strippers to the Quay, Fred Bonadonna resisted.

Cammisano, a top lieutenant in the Civella organization, appealed to the senior Bonadonna to intercede on his behalf with Freddie. But Dave Bonadonna

washed his hands of the matter. With that, evidently, his fate was sealed.

"The way the Mafia works, they go after the major threat first, then they go after the target," the investigator said. "Dave was a guy to be reckoned with, and they knew they had to take him out first."

The lawlessness soon escalated. In September, a pipe bomb thought to be the work of Freddie Bonadonna's loose group of confederates exploded on the back doorstep of the Trap. The bombing came only hours after fire damaged Uncle Joe's Tavern, a River Quay bar owned by Joseph Cammisano, Willie the Rat's brother.

Then in February, John Amaro, a Cammisano-Civella associate otherwise known as Johnny Green, was shotgunned to death as he pulled into the garage of his upper-middle class suburban home on North Flora. Because the hit had taken place in the mob's Northland enclave just a few doors down from the adjacent homes of Nick Civella and his brother, Carl, the Outfit struck back fast and hard.

Three nights later, on Feb. 22, 1977, Harold "Sonny" Bowen, a cocky, tough-guy associate of Freddie's, was blown away as he sat drinking in the crowded Mr. O'Brien's Lounge at 3507 Broadway. Neither the Amaro or Bowen murders were ever solved, but authorities assumed that Bowen had done the hit on Amaro, and was immediately killed for it.

As if to underscore where power ultimately resided in Kansas City, a massive explosion flattened two River Quay bars owned by Fred Bonadonna a little over a month after the Bowen murder. Authorities estimated that 100 pounds of dynamite were used to level the two-block building. The explosion took place shortly after 2 a.m., and luckily, no one was injured.

Still, the violence wasn't over. On Aug. 5, 1977, another Bonadonna associate suspected in the Amaro hit, Gary T. Parker, was taken out when a bomb placed under his car detonated in front of Louie's Bar and Grill on Truman Road.

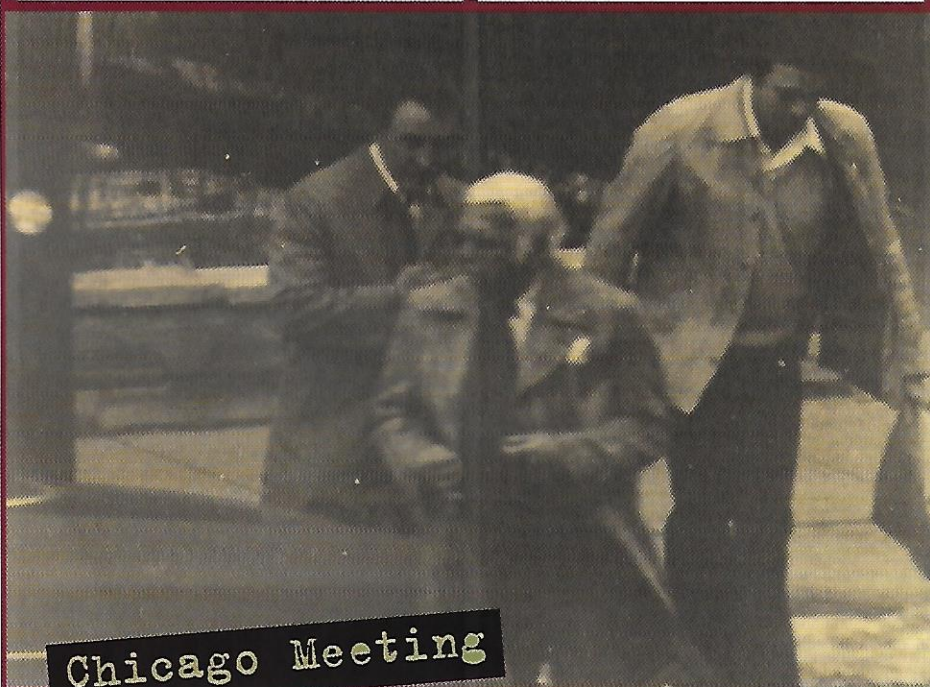
"Parker T, that's what they called him—he

was a piece of work," the investigator recalled. "We tried to help him. We told him, 'You're in way over your head, partner. This could cost you your life.' But he thought it was fun, he was like a mob wanna-be, and he went his own way. And they bided their time, and they got him."

The violence swirling around the River Quay, not surprisingly, had a ruinous effect on the area's popularity. By late 1977, most of the Quay's establishments had closed. Many had simply boarded up windows shattered by the March explosion.

But Cork, whose nickname reportedly stemmed from his violent temper and impulsiveness, suggested that Bonadonna brought the difficulties on himself.

"Freddie tried to run the whole—the whole, everybody," said Civella, who wore a snow-white toupee and who could often be found holding court at his fruit stand in the River Market. "He tried to tell everybody what to do. He wanted to go cut and dictate to everybody that they couldn't have go-go girls. You couldn't have strips. He told some they couldn't serve food.



Chicago Meeting

Authorities ultimately were able to bring extortion charges against both Cammisano brothers on the strength of information provided by Bonadonna. Initially both pled guilty. Joseph then retracted his plea, was tried and convicted. But he died before doing any time. Willie served five years in prison. Freddie Bonadonna testified about his experience at a Congressional organized crime hearing, then disappeared into the ether of the witness protection program.

As for the Outfit, Carl "Cork" Civella, Nick's older brother, had assumed control after Nick went to prison in 1977. In an interview with the *Kansas City Star* at the height of the River Quay troubles, he denied any involvement in the violence.

That's where the trouble started."

As the River Quay War was winding down, Nick Civella succeeded in winning an early medical discharge from prison. Doctors expected that cancer would kill him within two years. Evidently, there were some loose ends that needed cleaning up before the boss would return in June of '78. Chief among them were the Spero brothers.

Bad blood had been brewing between the Speros and Civellas at least since 1972, when Nick Spero, yet another brother and the charismatic leader of the clan—also an official in Teamsters Local 41—had been found shot to death in the trunk of a car. Reportedly, the Outfit had killed Nick because he was accumulating too much

power within the local. His brothers, particularly the hyper-aggressive Carl, had openly vowed revenge, authorities said.

"They were a fearsome bunch," the investigator said of the Speros. "Strong, tough guys, real macho, not afraid of anyone. But their judgment was clouded. The only way you beat the Outfit is from the inside, through finesse, deceit or betrayal, or through some kind of coup d'état. You can't win by taking them on directly."

That lesson was driven home on the bloody night of May 16, 1978 when the Spero brothers were targeted at the Virginian Tavern. Following the attack, the FBI scrambled to gain authorization for additional wiretaps and bugs, despite its

SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS SHOW CARL "CORK" CIVELLA, CENTER IN LEFT PHOTO, EMERGING FROM A MEETING OF REGIONAL MOB FIGURES IN CHICAGO. HE IS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS ASSOCIATE CARL DELUNA, LEFT, AND ANTHONY CHIAVOLA JR.



earlier failure with the devices attached in the alleged hitmen's cars. Gaining the necessary approval wasn't an easy task.

"People have this impression that all an FBI agent has to do to get a wiretap is snap his fingers," the investigator said. "But we had to establish that specific people were violating specific laws at specific locations, and we had to show that other investigative techniques would not work. Basically, it was seen as a last resort."

It was from one of the bugs, attached underneath a backroom table at the Villa Capri Restaurant on Independence Avenue, that agents hit pay dirt on June 2.

Cork Civella and Carl "Tuffy" DeLuna, Nick's top lieutenant and chief enforcer, were discussing a problem involving

someone they called Genius. There was cryptic talk of debt service and the Teamsters Union, as well as known coded terms for mobsters in Chicago. It soon became apparent to incredulous agents that the two were talking about a fight for control of several Las Vegas casinos. Evidently, this individual "Genius" was on his way out—one way or another.

"Genius wants to make a public announcement, right?" DeLuna told Civella, according to an FBI transcript. "Which, those were my words to him: 'Do what you got to do, boy. Make your public announcement that you are getting out of this for whatever f_____ reason you want to pick. And get out.'"

It was evident from that initial conversation that DeLuna—effectively the Outfit's chief operating officer—was being fed information on a regular basis from a contact in Vegas. The feds put a tail on him and eventually determined that he was making calls from the Breckenridge Inn, now the Park Place Hotel, just north of I-435 and Front Street. Even so, the FBI lacked probable cause to get a tap on the phone. Former agent Hart recalled how they managed to obtain the necessary prerequisite.

"This was back in the days before we had many female agents, so some of the secretaries in the office volunteered to go down there, and when DeLuna showed up, they'd go use the pay phones and they overheard enough of his conversations to give us what we needed," he said. "They did a remarkable job."

The investigation quickly gained momentum as it drew from the main information pipeline between Vegas and Kansas City. What emerged through the dark window was a stunning picture of the mob's control over the Teamsters' billion-dollar Central States Pension Fund. By owning key members on the fund's board of trustees, the syndicates in Kansas City, Chicago, Cleveland and Milwaukee controlled where the fund's cash was "invested." In the case of Kansas City, that influence had been exerted for years through corrupted-local-boy-made good

and Teamster official Roy Williams.

The surveillance tapes went on to reveal that the Midwestern families' were systematically looting at least three Las Vegas Casinos: the Tropicana, the Stardust and the Fremont. On a weekly basis, tens of thousands of dollars skimmed from the casinos' count rooms was flown back to either Kansas City or Chicago and distributed proportionally among the criminal groups.

The "Genius" that DeLuna had spoken of was a wealthy young San Diego real estate developer named Allen Glick. Apparently Glick had big dreams of moving into Las Vegas in the early 1970s and establishing himself as "the next Howard Hughes," according to one investigator. To bankroll his vision, he had turned to the Teamsters' Central States Pension Fund.

Little did Glick realize the strings attached to the \$62.7 million loan he obtained from the Teamsters in August of '74. But Glick—the Strawman to the FBI—found out soon enough. His primary contact on the loan had been Frank Balistrieri, reputed head of the Milwaukee Mafia. Once Glick was established in Vegas, mob players, notably Lefty Rosenthal, otherwise known as "Crazy," quickly assumed control over the day-to-day operations of his two casinos, the Stardust and the Fremont, and the skimming began in earnest. By the time the FBI began listening in that summer of '78, a decision had been made to push Glick out altogether.

Across the ensuing months, more than 100 FBI agents worked in coordinated, simultaneous investigations in Milwaukee, KC, Cleveland, Chicago and Las Vegas to connect the dots that would form the framework of the Strawman case. Locally, considerable aid came from the Kansas City Police Department's Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit, Hart said.

"They provided us with a lot of important intelligence, and basically worked as full partners throughout the whole thing," he said.

Larry Weishar, a former sergeant who led one of KCPD's two intelligence sections, said local investigators "didn't care

that it wasn't a state case or a city case.

"Even though there were multiple agencies involved, there was a sense among all of us that we were pursuing this as one. We knew it was important, and it made our guys feel good to be a part of it," Weishar said.

As the investigation progressed, one phone tap or bug would provide information that would lead to authorization for the next. Ultimately, more than 1,300 hours of tapes drawn from devices at more than a dozen locations would be amassed.

Needless to say, the investigators gained considerable insight into the inner workings of the Civella organization as the pieces of Strawman came together. One meeting between the Civella brothers and the Outfit's Vegas representatives—held at the home of a Northland neighbor often used as a safe-house for major confabs—was particularly revealing, DeFeo said.

"It's burned into my memory," he said. "I was sitting there with Gary Hart, and I remember thinking how these two men, Nick and Cork, with grade-school educations, were discussing problems in almost the same calm, dispassionate way that, for example, Hart and I might discuss problems. How do you staff a project? What about your supervision, your span of control and quality control mechanisms? They were talking about how they could know if people were stealing from the money that they were stealing for the mob."

"It was a distinct reminder to me not to underestimate them, despite the differences in our vocabularies and grammatical skills," DeFeo said. "They were extremely able criminal executives. They had natural talent, they were intelligent and they were wholly unrestrained by law or morality."

Clark B. Hall, a veteran FBI agent who'd worked organized crime cases for 15 years, arrived in Kansas City to help assemble the mountain of evidence in the Strawman case. Based on hours of listening to the tapes, he came away with a fair

amount of admiration for Nick Civella.

"I've never heard any one deal more effectively with his subordinates, or exhibit better command and leadership than Nick Civella," Hall said. "He was not a confrontational guy with his subordinates. He talked in a very level, authoritative tone. But no one—whether it be Carl DeLuna or Cork or Willie the Rat—no one would question his authority."

Hall is now a managing director with DSFX International Inc., a Virginia-based corporate investigative and security firm.

In February 1979, agents figured they'd learned all they could from electronic surveillance. In any case, the stress of the massive effort was beginning to take a toll, the investigator recalled.

"The inter-office problems were escalating," he said. "Everybody had their own agenda, and nobody was in agreement on the direction or timing of the case. And at some point, you've got to bring it down."

Bring it down they did. On Valentine's Day, 1979, Carl Caruso, a courier who made regular runs to Vegas to pick up the Tropicana skim proceeds for the Midwestern bosses, was grabbed by the FBI as he stepped off a plane at Kansas City International Airport. Caruso, known as "The Singer" in the Outfit, was wearing a coat with two specially made breast pockets. Each held a "sandwich," or a package of \$40,000 in skimmed cash.

Agents fanned out that evening to execute 43 search warrants at the homes and businesses of Outfit players across the city. The sweep largely came up dry, with one extraordinary exception. When agents raided DeLuna's home in Gladstone, they discovered hundreds of hand-written, color-coded, 3x5 index cards documenting not only financial records from the Vegas skim operation, but also many of the other Outfit activities, down to the skimming from the weekly bingo game in Kansas City, Kan. There were records and dates of

meetings, of trips to Vegas and Chicago, and even records of payments made to wives of Outfit members in prison.

The entries were peppered with code names like Plug, Stompy and the Deerhunter. But when matched against information that had already come up in the audio conversations, the individuals' identities were quickly decipherable.

A typical entry in DeLuna's primitive but effective data base was Sunday, Dec. 5, 1976: "22 came by. CP took ON to Noland's house to visit with 22. They visited about 2 hrs. 22 brought 65,750 twice. ON setting aside 60 for deer. (5750 short) I presume 50 for monks is included in the two 65750s. I'll ask."

Translation: ON was Nick Civella. 22 was Joey "Doves" Aiuppa, the boss of the Chicago mob and a primary partner with Civella in the Vegas skim operation. On this day, Aiuppa apparently had delivered \$131,500 in skim money from Glick's casinos to split with Kansas City and "Deer," or Deerhunter, a.k.a. Milton Rockman, a traveling emissary for the Cleveland mob. The monks, or monkeys, were the trustees of the Central States Pension Fund. Since they'd been the ones who'd bankrolled Glick in the first place and thus managed to get the skim rolling in Vegas, they got their cut, too.

"It was a bonanza," said Hart, who recalled that DeLuna showed no emotion when the documents were found. His wife even provided agents with coffee and cookies that night, he said.

Asked why DeLuna would maintain such incriminating records, Hart noted that as Outfit's chief of staff, DeLuna routinely handled considerable sums of money.

"He wanted to cover himself with these guys in case any questions were ever raised about what he did with it," Hart said.

Armed with DeLuna's records, as well as the wiretap transcripts, agents continued to gather new information and seek out key witnesses. On the basis of conversations picked up during the electronic eavesdropping, prosecutors elected to first go after Nick Civella. He was charged

with violating his parole by conspiring to kill Carl Spero, who'd been shadowing the crime boss since the shooting that had left Spero crippled in 1978.

On the tapes, Nick pointed out that Spero would be hard to kill.

"He's a moving target," Nick warned.

"What's the difference?" Cork responded. "Deers move."

By early 1980, Nick was back in prison. The tapes provided additional ammunition that also led to a conviction for conspiring to bribe a prison official in order to win preferential treatment for Tony "Ripe" Civella, Cork's son. Tony Ripe had gone up on the same gambling charge that had sent Nick to jail in the mid-1970s.

"That was the case that we could move the fastest on," said David B.B. Helfrey, a former strike force attorney who worked side-by-side with DeFeo. "We wanted to take Nick off the street and disrupt the organization's leadership."

The first wave of Strawman indictments came down in 1981 against the Kansas City hierarchy and several lesser Vegas associates. The 11 were charged with skimming \$280,000 in gambling receipts from the Tropicana casino between June of '78 and the Valentine's Day raid in '79. Key testimony in the trial was provided by Joseph Vincent Agosto, one of the Kansas City Outfit's Vegas representatives. Agosto—a veteran mobster who had infiltrated the Tropicana as, of all things, the director of its floor show—was the contact to whom DeLuna had communicated via the pay phone over the FBI's many months of surveillance. But now Agosto was worried that he might get hit whether he testified or not. So he rolled over.

In March 1983, just before the trial started, an ailing Nick Civella received yet another emergency medical parole from the Springfield, Mo. federal medical center for prisoners. Two weeks later, he was dead. More than 2,000 mourners turned out to pay their respects.

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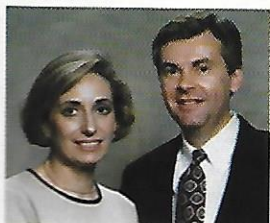
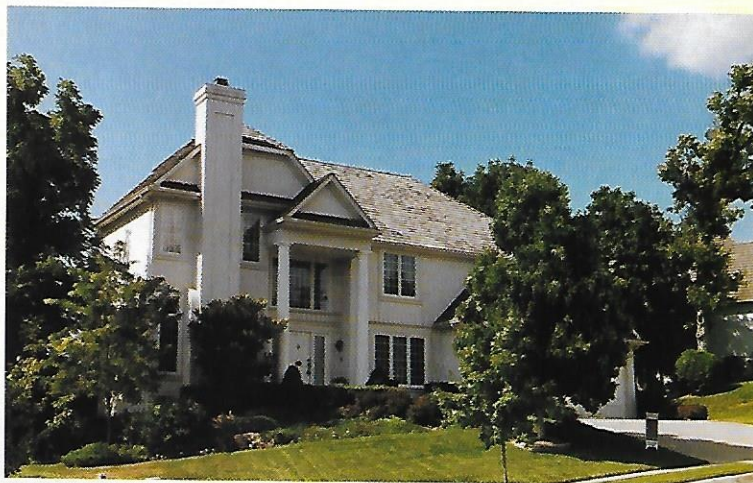
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Nick beat the rap through death, but others in his organization could not so easily escape. In July 1983, convictions were secured against all but one of the remaining defendants, including Cork Civella, Tuffy DeLuna and Charles Moretina, allegedly another Kansas City lieutenant. The scrappy, no-nonsense federal judge in the case, Joseph Stevens Jr., sentenced DeLuna and Cork Civella to 30 years each.

As if to drive home the strength of the government's case, DeLuna, Civella, and Peter Tamburello, Nick Civella's body-

guard-driver and the only defendant who'd walked in the first case, were immediately re-indicted—along with 12 others—in the second phase of Strawman. The charges centered on the alleged \$2 million skimming operation at Glick's Argent Corp. casinos.

This time, the indictments spread well beyond Kansas City to include Glick's original contact on the teamster loan, Milwaukee boss Frank Balistreri, as well as Chicago boss Aiuppa and three of his top lieutenants, John Cerone, Joseph

Lombardo and Angelo LaPietra. Also indicted were Milton Rockman of the Cleveland mob and Anthony "Tony the Ant" Spilotro, the ruthless street boss for Chicago in Vegas.

Despite the Outfit's defeat in the Tropicana case and the prospect of further damage from the pending trial, a wounded Civella organization apparently showed that it still had teeth in early 1984. Carl Spero, confined to a wheelchair since the Virginian Tavern shooting, was killed when a bomb detonated in the office of his used car lot near downtown.

The Argent trial finally got underway in early '86 after more than two years of legal maneuvering by attorney Goodman and others. As the government's case unfolded, a key witness turned out to be Glick himself. In unemotional tones, the balding young man explained how he, only too late, realized the trap into which he'd fallen.

At one point, Glick testified, he was hustled to Kansas City in the middle of the night to meet with parties unknown. He was taken to a darkened hotel room, and then grilled in front of a blinding white light by none other than Nick Civella himself.

When Glick complained about the light, Civella, wearing dark glasses and inches from his face, threatened to rip out his eyes. "You don't know me, but it would be my choice that you would never leave this room alive," Civella reportedly said. Civella made it clear that he alone was responsible for the Teamster loan Glick had received, and he demanded a \$1.2 million commission.

In the spring of 1978, just before events began to spiral out of control for the Outfit, Glick had been summoned to another meeting, this one with DeLuna in the Vegas office of Oscar Goodman. It was this meeting that DeLuna had been recounting to Cork Civella during that first bugged conversation at the Villa Capri. In his testimony, Glick confirmed that DeLuna had instructed him in no uncertain terms to sell out his interest in Argent immediately.

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"He said he was certain I wouldn't find my children's lives expendable," Glick said. "With that, he looked down on a piece of paper and gave me the names and ages of each of my sons. The meeting ended with me saying that I was willing to sell."

"Glick was very matter-of-fact, and the effect was devastating," said Hall, who played a key role in convincing Glick to testify. As for Glick's reasons for speaking out: "It was a business deal to him. We told him the government would be very appreciative of his cooperation. He said, 'Well, what do you want to know?' He was an extremely ballsy guy."

Other key witnesses in the Argent trial included Angelo Lonardo, a Cleveland underboss whom authorities had managed to flip, and the ailing Roy Williams, once the Teamsters' president and long the Civella organization's primary conduit to the pension fund loot. On the stand with his oxygen bottle, Williams told of taking bribes of \$1,500 a month from Civella.

"He was a good friend," Williams said. "But he also intimidated me. I was afraid, too."

Hall remembered some of the Argent trial's more revealing moments. In the mornings when Joey "Doves" Aiuppa, the aging Chicago boss, would enter the room, everyone on the defense side would quickly rise out of respect. This was, after all, the boss of bosses in Chicago. Then there was Spilotro, the volatile killer made infamous by Joe Pesci's portrayal in the factually flawed, if dramatic 1995 movie rendition of *Strawman*, "Casino." Virtually all the defendants, their attorneys and supporters showed great deference, if not outright obsequiousness toward Spilotro. All except DeLuna, whom, Hall said, seemed wholly unmoved by Spilotro's fearsome reputation. "DeLuna struck me as someone who was afraid of absolutely no one," Hall said.

Ultimately, only two of the original defendants in the Argent case—sons of Milwaukee boss Frank Balistrieri—were acquitted. The remaining 13 either pleaded guilty or were convicted. By the spring

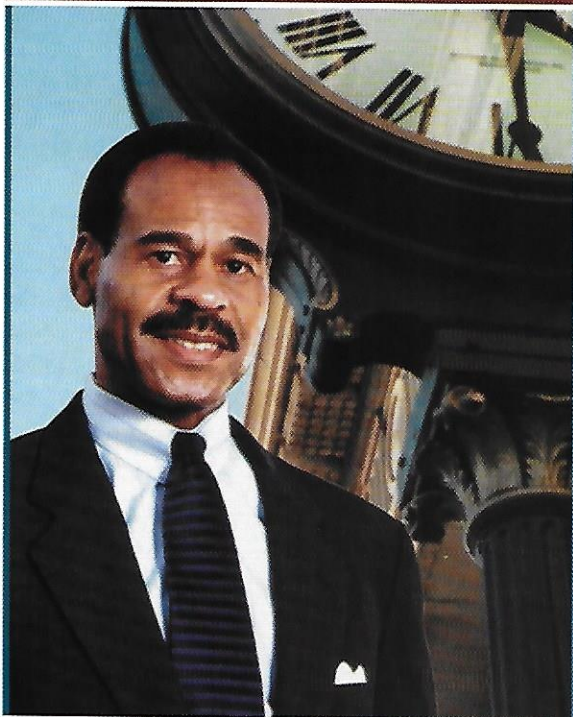
of 1986, Strawman was over and authorities tallied the score.

The Kansas City Outfit was in shambles: Its boss was dead and its top leadership in prison or headed there. The mob's grip on the Teamsters' pension fund had been broken and its influence in Las Vegas exposed. Cleveland's Rockman had been nailed, as had Balistrieri. With the loss of Joey Doves and his associates, the Chicago syndicate had been dealt a serious blow, although the investigator acknowledged: "Their bench was a lot deeper than Kansas City's."

Hall, who'd joined Strawman late on the strength of his work against organized crime figures in Milwaukee and Las Vegas—notably Balistrieri and Spilotro—recalled his feelings after the verdict came down.

"I'd been working on this stuff for 15 years by the time we got to that courtroom," he said. "Now these guys were in front of me and convicted. All of that work, all of those surveillances, the wire taps, all of those nights eating cold pizza

Under the Clock



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mores at Blue Valley three years ago. Neither instance had been reported to authorities.

In July, Gault called Jessica. He apologized formally, and offered to take Jessica and her mother to dinner and to pay for psychological bills. They declined his overtures. Soon after, Gault quit his job at Blue Valley High School. And then he disappeared.

After Gault was formally charged with contributing to a child's misconduct, he was released on a \$1,500 bond. Since he left town, he had been living in Grinnell, Iowa, on a family farm.

Although unnamed, Jessica was subsequently caught up in a media circus, the story of her relationship with Thomas Gault splashed all over the news and the local papers. Diana Miller felt enraged that her daughter had to be the poster child for a case that was a clear instance of sexual abuse but difficult to win because of the low age of consent. "Jessica has been teased by her peers at school," Diana said. "They've come up to her and said, 'Hey, Jessica Smith, did you have sex with Mr. Gault?' The whole thing has been devastating for her." Moreover, Diana and Jessica's attorney, Michelle Hostetler, are considering legal action against the Blue Valley School District, concerning the school's alleged cover-up of the other two girls' involvement with Gault.

There have been other psychological difficulties for Jessica. "She has experienced something similar to being raped," stated Steve Erikson, Jessica's therapist. "The guilt, shame, and sense of betrayal are tremendous. There is a tendency to blame herself, there's a lot of pain and suffering. Her self-esteem has hit a low. And don't forget how this has affected Jessica's mother, Diana. The serenity and security of her family have been shattered. She has been through hell."

Why is the age of sexual consent so low in Kansas? According to Representative Bob Tomlinson, one of the main reasons is that 18-year-old boys were being charged

with their 16-year-old girlfriends. And Kansas is not alone. Thirty-five other states have a consensual sex age as low as 16. And states such as Hawaii and South Carolina have age of consent laws at 14 years old.

In Kansas, though, it is a felony for adults to have sex with juveniles who are 15 years old and younger. But the legal loophole remains with children who are 16 and 17 years old and not protected from predatory adults. (Eighteen-year-olds are adults in the eyes of the law)

Even Carl Cornwell, Gault's criminal defense attorney, feels that there needs to be legislation protecting 16- and 17-year-olds. "Something should be on the books," Cornwell said. "Anyone with half a brain would think the same thing." In addition, when Judge Ruddick dismissed the charges, he admitted that as a father he found Gault's actions "disgusting" and "repugnant."

Regrettably, there is a chance that Gault could be hired again as a teacher. Although attorney Carl Cornwell reported that Gault was not planning to teach anymore, as of January 3, 2000, the Kansas Department of Education had not revoked Gault's teaching certificate.

Both Erikson and Steve McBride, executive director of the Kansas City Branch of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, agree that the most damaging aspect of all this is the breach of trust. "Children are taught that a teacher is an authority figure, someone to respect," McBride stated. "Once that trust has been broken, it completely destroys their sense of right and wrong."

Jessica Smith is healing slowly from her ordeal. "When people have suffered from sexual abuse, I counsel them to change from being a victim to a survivor," said Steve Erikson. "And Jessica is definitely a survivor."

Jessica knows she should have used better judgment but feels she was young and naïve and didn't know what she was doing. She also believes it was immoral for Mr. Gault to encourage such a hurtful relationship. "I truly did love him," admitted Jessica, "but I hope he gets into some kind of therapy so he won't do this again."

in the back of a van, all of that finally paid off. For all of us, it was a moment of extreme vindication. There was no more crowning achievement in my modest little professional life."

Helfrey, now a well-known criminal attorney based in St. Louis, said he believes the fact that Lonardo, Williams and Glick survived after testifying had a ripple effect across the country.

"Here you had top people in the organizations testifying, and living," he said. "It was a big deal. We demonstrated that the mob was not invulnerable. After that, in other cases, you saw a lot more people come forward."

In Kansas City, authorities scored a significant victory after Strawman in 1992, when Tony Ripe, one of Cork Civella's sons, was convicted of fraud in connection with a scheme to illegally acquire and resell more than \$1 million worth of prescription drugs. He was sentenced to 4 and a half years.

Tony Ripe has since been released, as have Moretina and Tamburello. DeLuna, now 72, was paroled from the federal corrections center in Memphis on April 17, 1996. Carl Caruso, "The Singer," died in 1991. Cork Civella died in prison in 1994. Willie the Rat Cammisano died in 1995.

Reached at his home, Tony Ripe declined to comment for this story. DeLuna, contacted through his probation officer, also declined to be interviewed. Tamburello, reached through his son, likewise did not respond to a request for an interview. Only Moretina spoke, albeit briefly, about the case.

"As far I'm concerned, they just made a case out of nothing," he said. "It was all bullshit."

So did Strawman truly wreck organized crime in Kansas City?

Most of the former feds think so.

"I think they've been reduced to the level of a street gang trying to scrape out a living," said Helfrey.

Added the investigator: "They're still out there, but their impact

NELSON FROM PG-43 the Greater Kansas City Sports Commission & Foundation and a backer of the Kemper improvements, wonders what would happen if Kemper could be outfitted with amenities that NHL and NBA teams want—luxury suites and club seating—and if the area around Kemper could be fixed up into a district that drew crowds like the Country Club Plaza or Westport.

"Could you, in fact, then attract an NBA or NHL team having the minimum amount of seats as opposed to leaving Kemper as it is and having to build before you get a team?" he asks. "There are limits to what you can and cannot do in a market our size."

Nelson fails to fathom a hip and happening West Bottoms district, especially with so many projects either completed or in the works downtown. Bartle Hall, he charges, needs an adjacent 20,000-seat arena to attract bigger conventions, and Julia Kauffman has selected the site for a proposed performing arts center nearby across Interstate 70. DST and others have invigorated downtown's west side with new hotels, businesses, housing and nightspots, and the proposed Power & Light District, if it ever materializes, could provide parking for the arena and even more surrounding places for people to frequent.

"If you go to an event at Kemper, if you don't want to go to the Golden Ox, there's nothing to do," Nelson asserts. "Let's maximize the impact of all the facilities that we're building and try not to create a whole different center city somewhere else."

REFITTING KEMPER

Even if a new downtown arena is built, the city still must use Kemper in some capacity. Taxpayers, did, after all, dump \$215 million into the structure. Nelson recognizes that and suggests that the building could house year-round horse, rodeo and other events more closely related to the American Royal. Signs indicate that Kemper already is on the verge of losing users, even without a competing downtown arena. The Kansas City Blade


are not moving, so will continue to share Kemper with the American Royal, Kansas City Attack and a various patchwork of concerts and tournaments as tenants. But the Big 12 basketball tournament is moving to Dallas in 2003 and 2004. While it returns again in 2005, San Antonio and Denver, both of which have vibrant downtown areas, also are making a bid for the event in later years. The one new user could be a team from the newly formed ABA, a fledgling professional basketball team.

Those cities also have major league teams operating in the arenas, and to simply keep or attract the Big 12 tournament hardly amounts to justification to build a new stadium in Kansas City. But Nelson claims that the feasibility study indicated that the Kansas City area could support an NBA or NHL team, and much of it would come from corporations that buy luxury suites and sponsorships. But the team's owners also would have to make available plenty of competitively priced tickets for families and individual fans.

Can it happen? Nelson thinks so. Unlike five years ago, when he ran into a buzzsaw of sorts after suggesting a downtown arena development, Nelson thinks attitudes are changing.

"I think we need more dynamic thinking in the community, and I think we're starting to get it," he says. "I think people are feeling better about this city. But we need a facility to attract a team; nobody is going to play on a permanent basis at Kemper."

Gray wonders whether the average guy in Kansas City could afford to take his family to even one professional basketball or hockey game, given the high cost of tickets, parking and concessions. But even he admits that Nelson has opened minds. Certainly nothing is impossible. Whoever thought the area would become a NASCAR destination with a brand new speedway, he asks.

"There's no question that Bill has helped to heighten the awareness and help people dream a little bit," he says. "You've got to have dreamers; you've got to have people who are passionate." 

MOB FROM PG-58 on city life is gone. They'd lost everything, their top leadership, the Teamsters, their political clout. They'd been embarrassed. Maybe if left alone and ignored by law enforcement they'll be resurrected. But it seems doubtful. Times have changed, and the chemistry's just not there."

Echoed Hall, "Once a boulder that big rolls all the way down the hill, it's awfully hard to push it back up again."

Chris Whitley, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Kansas City, declined to offer any specifics on the current status of organized crime here. He said the organized crime strike force continues to operate against traditional organized crime, as well as Asian and European criminal outfits. "It stays busy," Whitley said. "There are active investigations under way, and there's plenty of work to be done."

The investigator, who worked organized crime on the streets of Kansas City from before the River Quay until after Strawman, said the whole experience seems almost surreal today.

He noted that the mob could have never achieved the power, wealth and influence that it did here without at least the tacit consent of more than a few public servants, professionals and businessmen, who either actively sought out their services or simply looked away.

His view on what motivated his adversaries across the years? "It wasn't so much that they think of you and I as chumps for working for a living and paying our taxes. That's part of it, but it's a lot more complicated than that."

"What they realize, probably more than anybody else, is the nature of human weakness. They know money buys power. They know people can easily be corrupted. And they know everyone has a price. They were simply in the marketplace, doing what they believed they had a right to do." 