

# DeNaples steps back under Poconos casino deal

## Perjury charges dropped

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The high-profile case of The Law, The Billionaire, the reputed Mob Boss and the \$412 million, 900-acre Mount Airy Casino Resort is over.

Unusual in a high-stakes game of slots, it was a four-way win — with a potential loser: the public.

Here's why four can claim they won, why the case turned around and how the public could win if the state adopted changes in its gaming law suggested by the prosecutor.

First, the winners:

► Louis DeNaples, 67, can claim he won, because Dauphin County District Attorney Edward M. Marsico Jr. dropped four perjury charges against him for allegedly lying about his associations with onetime mob boss William "Big Billy" D'Elia and others to Gaming Control Board investigators.

"Relieved and gratified" by the settlement, DeNaples said in a statement yesterday that the perjury charges were "baseless."



Associated Press

**Louis DeNaples (left) speaks to Rev. Joseph Sica at the Mount Airy Casino Resort on opening day, 2007. Under a settlement, the two no longer face perjury charges.**

"I have said from the start I have no connection to organized crime, and that's the truth."

► Marsico contends he forced billionaire

Louis DeNaples out of the state's gaming business, made him pay for prosecution costs and gave legal control of his casino, incorporated as Mount Airy No. 1 LLC, to his daughter, Lisa DeNaples.

► Rev. Joseph Sica's perjury charges also were dropped as part of the DeNaples negotiations. Sica, a confidante of DeNaples, was charged with lying about his relationship with the late upstate mob boss Russell Bufalino, for whom D'Elia once drove.

► D'Elia struck a deal with feds, who agreed to seek a reduction in his sentence in an unrelated case if he cooperated in the DeNaples probe. D'Elia testified before the DeNaples grand jury. D'Elia pleaded guilty to witness tampering and conspiracy, and 16 charges were dropped. With time served, he could be released in seven years.

The turning point in the case?

Exit DeNaples attorney Richard Sprague and others, who were waging a war against prosecutors in the state Supreme Court.

Enter Joshua Lock, dubbed a Harrisburg superlawyer who took a calmer approach in talks with the D.A.'s office.

"It became apparent that acrimonious litigation and those tactics were not benefiting anybody," said Lock. "I knew the people I was dealing with were honorable people . . . who would keep an open mind."

Within six months of Lock taking over, a deal was signed, on Friday.

Lock gave prosecutors a detailed state-

See **CASINO** Page 31

## TAINTED JUSTICE

# Misconduct probe takes 2 more narcotics officers off street

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Two more narcotics officers have been placed on desk duty as FBI and local investigators delve deeper into allegations of police misconduct.

Officers Robert McDonnell and Richard Cujdik, both veterans of the Narcotics Field Unit, were recently removed from the street, although they retain their department-issued guns and police powers, Internal Affairs Chief Inspector Anthony DiLacqua said yesterday.

The officers' removal comes in the wake of the *Daily News* series "Tainted Justice," which began in

February with allegations that Officer Jeffrey Cujdik, Richard's brother, lied on search warrants to get into targeted drug homes and got too close to his informants.

Jeffrey Cujdik then became the focus of a federal-local task force and he was placed on desk duty and forced to give up his police powers and service weapon.

The investigation widened after the *Daily News* reported allegations leveled by 15 store owners that the Cujdik brothers and officers who worked with them destroyed or cut wires to surveillance cameras during raids for drug paraphernalia, specifically little ziplock bags. Once the cameras were disabled, thousands of dollars in cash and merchandise

went missing, the store owners alleged.

Richard Cujdik led a Sept. 11, 2007, raid of a West Oak Lane grocery store owned by Jose Duran. The officers used their bare hands, pliers and a bread knife from the store deli to cut camera wires, but didn't realize that Duran had a hidden back-up hard drive that captured part of the raid.

The video, obtained by the *Daily News* and viewable on philly.com, shows Richard Cujdik searching Duran's van, apparently without a search warrant. Duran alleges that the officers seized about \$10,000 in the raid, but in police paperwork documented taking only \$785.

McDonnell, who worked close-

ly with Jeffrey Cujdik, did not take part in the store raid. But McDonnell is linked to search warrants that are now in question.

For example, Jeffrey Cujdik wrote in an August 2007 search-warrant application that he and McDonnell watched a confidential informant buy marijuana from a North Philadelphia drug suspect known as "Pooh Bear." The informant, Ventura Martinez, told the *Daily News* that he'd never heard of "Pooh Bear" and didn't make the buy. In late February, federal prosecutors withdrew their case against the suspect.

Shortly afterward, McDonnell was taken off the street and put behind a desk at narcotics headquarters.

Last week, Richard Cujdik was transferred to the 15th Police District, at Harbison and Levick streets, where he is doing desk and phone work, DiLacqua said.

When asked why these three officers were singled out, DiLacqua said, "That's where the investigation led us." He declined to elaborate.

None of the officers has been charged with any wrongdoing. Jeffrey Cujdik's attorney has said the allegations are untrue. Richard Cujdik did not return a phone call last night. McDonnell has repeatedly declined comment.

Meanwhile, Assistant Public Defender Bradley S. Bridge has challenged 53 drug convictions so far, citing the *Daily News* reports in court papers. ★