

Centre Daily Times

[Thursday, Aug. 27, 2009]

Sunoco owner says he's fall guy

By Sara Ganim



BELLEFONTE — The attorney for local businessman Gregory Palazzari, accused of dealing cocaine out of his University Drive gas station, says his client is being set up.

Joe Amendola said the man who police used to catch Palazzari in the act was himself a dealer, looking to wiggle out of drug charges.

“He was not involved in this,” Amendola said after Palazzari’s preliminary hearing in Centre County court Wednesday. “This young man obviously got in trouble, as you heard in court today, decided he had to do something to help himself and chose Greg.”

Despite Amendola’s argument, all charges against Palazzari were bound over to county court for trial. Palazzari, who has been in county jail on \$50,000 bail since the local drug task force arrested him Friday, was expected to post bail and be released Wednesday, Amendola said.

The man police say was his supplier, Mario Rincon, 27, is also facing charges related to the bust, but isn’t expected in court until next week. He spent four days running from police

before surrendering Tuesday.

After the hearing Wednesday, Amendola said Rincon is actually the one to blame.

“Greg has told me a number of times since his arrest that the transactions were really between

the young man who was working for police and the other co-defendant, Mr. Rincon,” Amendola said, adding that Rincon was at Greg’s Sunoco when police had the informant purchase cocaine. “At worst, (Palazzari) was stupid for even telling the guy he knew somebody that could fix him up with cocaine.”

An undercover State College police detective said in court that he lost sight of the confidential informant when he was buying cocaine from Palazzari, but the informant testified Palazzari sold it to him.

Amendola said Wednesday that the gas station is a family business where Palazzari’s mother has worked for 30 years.

“The other thing that doesn’t add up in this case is that the young informant and the police have everyone believing that the informant was going in, buying cocaine and people were working, activities were going on, customers were present with their vehicles ... and this (drug dealing) was occurring,” Amendola said. “Greg says there’s no way that could have occurred.”

Because of the significant amount of cocaine allegedly dealt out of the station — the state Attorney General’s Office says \$50,000 a month between Rincon and Palazzari — the state is seeking forfeiture of the business.

Amendola says the Palazzari family will “vigorously” fight that.

When Palazzari and Rincon were arrested, police stumbled upon a third man, 23-year-old county corrections officer Curtis Vonada, who was living with Rincon in a Lemont apartment.

As Rincon fled the area, police say Vonada tried to hide \$28,500 in cocaine that was hidden in the house.

Attorney General Tom Corbett said later that he believes Rincon and Palazzari have been dealing in this area for years, even though the police investigation lasted only two months.

Amendola says that doesn’t make any sense.

“If he was selling drugs all these years out of this business,” he said, “is it really possible that this would be the first time that he was caught?”

Palazzari is the former boyfriend of Brenda Condon, a waitress who has been missing since 1991. Amendola said police have approached Palazzari since his arrest, asking him if he wanted to offer any more information on her disappearance.

Palazzari said he told police everything he knew nearly 20 years ago.

State police Cpl. Joe Cigich, who spent time investigating the case, corroborated that.

“Nothing pointed to his involvement to her disappearance at the time,” he said. “And there’s been nothing since come to light.”

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