

WF Man Gets 10 Years for Stealing \$5.3 Million

TRENTON — A title company owner from Westfield was sentenced to 10 years in prison last Friday for stealing a total of \$5.3 million entrusted to him as a settlement agent to pay off multiple mortgage loans in connection with real estate closings he handled, Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman announced.



Louis Macaluso

Louis Macaluso, 47, who formerly owned and operated Affinity Title Agency, Inc., was sentenced by state Superior Court Judge Edward A. Jerejian in Bergen County. In addition to the jail term, he also was ordered to pay a \$10,000 fine. Macaluso pleaded guilty on October 31 to an accusation charging him with theft and misconduct by a corporate official, both in the second degree. He was sentenced to 10 years on each of the charges, with the sentences to run concurrently. The Attorney General's Office, acting on behalf of the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance, previously arranged for Macaluso to surrender his New Jersey insurance producer license.

In pleading guilty, Macaluso admitted that, between July 2010 and September 2012, he failed to use funds entrusted to him as a settlement agent to pay off 34 outstanding mortgage loans on properties in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio. The unpaid balances totaled approximately \$5.3 million. Macaluso di-

verted the funds for his own use or the use of Affinity, according to a media release from the Attorney General's office. All of the homeowners involved had their mortgages paid off in full by the title companies that had insured the titles on the properties.

"Macaluso treated his license as a title insurer like it was a license to steal," Acting Attorney General Hoffman said. "This lengthy prison sentence should deter other dishonest operators in the industry who might be tempted to steal the large sums entrusted to them as fiduciaries."

"Individuals involved in home sales and the companies that finance and insure these transactions need to be able to trust that the licensed agents handling the transactions will act with honesty and integrity," Director Elie Honig of the Division of Criminal Justice said. "When agents like Macaluso breach that trust and steal, we will prosecute them to the full extent of the law."

The three companies that sustained losses — New Jersey Title Insurance Co., Commonwealth Land Title Insurance Co. and Title Resource Guaranty Co. — have filed civil actions in federal court against Macaluso, who executed consent judgments to pay full restitution. He has made an initial payment of \$700,000.

Union County Launches Instagram Page on Web

ELIZABETH — In the effort to continue outreach with residents, Union County Freeholder Chairman Christopher Hudak recently announced the launch of the County of Union's Instagram page during his county government reorganization speech. The page is at instagram.com/unioncountynj.

"With the opening of this new social media platform, the county continues to add new ways to communicate our services to the public," Freeholder Hudak said. "Social media has re-engineered the landscape in creating, sharing and exchanging information, and Union County is at the forefront of this technology."

Instagram is a free social media platform, acquired by Facebook in 2012, that will enable the county to share photographs — and written information — with the public.

Also as part of his initiatives, Freeholder Hudak also announced the county's webpage (www.ucnj.org) would be redesigned to make it easier

to navigate, and a subscription service would be added for periodic updates on county information.

The county currently maintains Facebook (ucnj.org/facebook), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/countyofunionnj>), YouTube account (ucnj.org/videochannel/), and a webpage at www.ucnj.org. The County of Union also uses the UC First Alert Network to immediately contact residents during a crisis or emergency.

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Peyton's Peek at the Week In Politics

By Paul Peyton of The Leader/Times

Christie Fires Deputy Chief Over Lane Closing Scandal

Governor Chris Christie fired one of his deputy chiefs, Bridget Anne Kelly, and removed his former campaign manager, Bill Stepien, from consideration as the new chairman of the New Jersey State Republican Committee over the Bridgegate scandal. Mr. Stepien also will not be a consultant to the National Republican Association (RNC). Gov. Christie is chairman of the RNC.

The action was announced last Thursday during a two-hour press conference after e-mails were published by *The Record* showing that members of the Christie administration were, in fact, behind the closing of two lanes of traffic to the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee for four days last September as retribution for Fort Lee Mayor Mark Sokolich not endorsing the Governor.

"I apologize to the people of Fort Lee, and I apologize to the members of the State legislature," Governor Christie said. "I am embarrassed and humiliated by the conduct of some of the people on my team. There is no doubt in my mind that the conduct that they exhibited is completely unacceptable and showed a lack of respect for their appropriate role of government and for the people that we're trusted to serve."

Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Deputy Executive Director Bill Baroni, a former New Jersey state senator, and David Wildstein, director of interstate capital projects for the New York and New Jersey Port Authority, resigned in December over the scandal.

Wildstein Charged With Contempt After Taking Fifth

The Assembly Transportation Committee last Thursday found David Wildstein, director of interstate capital projects for the New York and New Jersey Port Authority, in contempt for refusing to answer their questions during the committee's hearing.

Assemblyman John Wisniewski (D-18th, Sayreville), the committee's chairman, told Mr. Wildstein that subpoena rules do not allow a person testifying to take the fifth and refuse to answer questions.

Raia Resigns As State Republican Chairman

New Jersey Republican Committee Chairman Sam Raia has resigned after three years on the job.

"We've surpassed each of our goals during the three years of my chairmanship: We've reelected our gover-

nor (Chris Christie) by historic margins, raised \$8.8 million and laid the groundwork for the future success of our party," Mr. Raia said. "I couldn't be more thankful for the opportunity provided by Governor Christie and members of the state committee to serve our party."

Lynda Pagliughi will lead the NJGOP in an acting capacity until an internal election is held. Bill Stepien, the Governor's campaign manager during his two campaigns, was removed from consideration after his name appeared in e-mails related to the closing of lanes to the George Washington Bridge in Fort Lee.

Currie Re-Elected Chairman Of State Democratic Party

The New Jersey Democratic State Committee has officially re-elected John Currie chairman of the party for a two-year term. Mr. Currie is also chairman of the Passaic County Democratic Committee. He assumed the chairmanship of the state party in June.

Corruption Trial For Trenton Mayor Begins

The federal corruption trial for Trenton Mayor Tony Mack and his brother Ralphiel Mack began last week. Mack was indicted on six bribery and extortion counts, all related to a parking garage project run by informants for the FBI. *The Trenton Times* has reported.

The mayor is also charged with mail fraud for allegedly using the U.S. Mail to send a letter lowering the purchase price of the parking garage lot as a condition of the bribe, according to the report.

City Council Twists Mapp's Picks For Civ. Police, PD Director

New Plainfield Mayor Adrian Mapp's first day on the job got off to a rocky start when his picks for two civilian police officers and for a police director were thwarted by the city council, which also forced Mayor Mapp to cut his office's budget in half, mycentraljersey.com reported.

Mayor Mapp wants to appoint Carl Riley, a retired Union County Prosecutor's Office captain who briefly led the Springfield Police Department, as police director while police union leaders support Michael Gilliam, a police captain favored by the local Policemen's Benevolent Association who briefly served as acting police director.

The mayor's pick for public safety director is Siddeeq El-Amin, a retired Plainfield police captain who was police director in the late 1990s.

Guidelines OK'd for Law Enforce. Use of Drones

TRENTON — Legislation sponsored by Senator Nicholas P. Scutari (D-22nd, Scotch Plains) that would set forth specific guidelines to be followed by law enforcement agencies when employing unmanned aerial vehicles, also known as drones, for surveillance purposes has received final legislative approval in the state Senate.

Under provisions of S-2702, law enforcement agencies would be prohibited from using a drone unless that law enforcement agency has obtained a warrant, or exigent circumstances exist making it unreasonable to obtain a warrant. A law enforce-

ment agency would not be required to obtain a warrant if a person or property owner that the agency seeks information about provides written consent permitting the use of a drone. The bill would permit the Missing Persons Unit to utilize a drone for search and rescue missions, locating high risk missing persons or child or following a notification that a person is abducted or missing by an Amber Alert or Silver Alert. Fire departments could use them to monitor the extent of damage caused by a fire to a building or structure.

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Lawmakers Comment On Bridgegate Scandal

TRENTON — State lawmakers reacted last week following developments that the closing of traffic lanes in Fort Lee near the George Washington Bridge was, in fact, retribution for the Fort Lee mayor, Mark Sokolich, not endorsing Governor Chris Christie. Their statements are listed below:

"What I've seen today (January 8th) for the first time is unacceptable. I am outraged and deeply saddened to learn that not only was I misled by a member of my staff, but this completely inappropriate and unsanctioned conduct was made without my knowledge. One thing is clear: this type of behavior is unacceptable and I will not tolerate it because the people of New Jersey deserve better. This behavior is not representative of me or my administration in any way, and people will be held responsible for their actions."

Governor Chris Christie (R)

"The actions of top Christie administration officials represent politics at its absolute worst. It destroys people's confidence in its elected leaders. I acknowledge the Governor for taking responsibility for the unacceptable actions of his staff and appointees and for taking the necessary steps today to remove them from their positions."

Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald (D-6th, Camden)

"Right now, we have no idea how far this scandal goes. The Governor has created a culture where cavalierly endangering citizens' lives to exact political retribution is an acceptable form of governance. It's beneath the dignity of his office and a breach of New Jerseyans' trust. Everyone who had knowledge of the closing should be terminated immediately and the Department of Justice should conduct a thorough investigation to determine whether other towns in New Jersey suffered because the Governor wanted to get revenge."

Sen. Barbara Buono (D-18th, Metuchen)
2013 Dem Candidate for Governor

"The Governor has taken responsibility and demonstrated leadership. The released e-mails were very troubling and disturbing. The Governor is deeply troubled and disappointed by the actions of certain staffers. He has faced this challenge directly. I hope we can move forward with the important reforms of the Christie era. I again applaud the Governor's leadership."

Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21st, Westfield)

"The actions by Governor Christie's administration that resulted in the lane closures on the nation's busiest bridge are disgraceful and represent the worst type of political retaliation and abuse of public trust. Governor Christie must come clean, take full responsibility and explain in detail exactly what occurred. Today's (January 9th) press conference served to raise more questions than it answered. All of the facts surrounding this incident must be put on the table immediately and any and all appropriate actions should be taken to hold everyone involved accountable."

Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-6th, Long Branch)

"The Governor took responsibility for an appalling situation that clearly was wrong and should not have oc-

curred. He demonstrated decisiveness in taking action immediately when presented with the facts. This is an essential quality for any chief executive."

Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7th, Westfield)

"The people around the country who have found Chris Christie plain-speaking and presidential are really projecting their own hopes of what a politician with integrity would look like. They don't really know him. But we in New Jersey have seen for years that he has a bullying streak. Now for people around the country, the first thing they actually learn about him is that he either took part in petty, vindictive payback or created a climate where that could take place. And I don't think people are going to like that."

Rep. Rush Holt (D-12th, W. Windsor)

"The Governor's actions [on January 9th] still leave many questions unanswered and cast a shadow on both his competency and credibility. Based on what we've seen and heard so far, I don't believe the Governor is being truthful to the people of this state when he denies any knowledge of this incident prior to [January 8th]. Weeks ago he mockingly dismissed the notion that he would have anything to do with a traffic study, and yet we saw in the documents released [January 8th] that he did in fact approve a study for the town of Springfield. The Governor was right on one thing, however, when he said this is about politics — it's about the politics of fear. The fact is, a punitive and vindictive culture was apparently allowed to thrive in the Governor's office where staff thought abusing public resources and jeopardizing public safety in the name of retribution was acceptable behavior. In the end, there were grave public safety consequences as a result of this vendetta, consequences that cannot be undone by a mere apology. There are far too many unanswered questions and references in the subpoenaed documents we've seen and Mr. [David] Wildstein's decision to hide behind the Fifth Amendment did a disservice to the people of this state."

Asw. Linda Stender (D-22nd, Scotch Plains)

Editor's Note: The following is in response to the documents that were released Friday on Bridgegate:

"These documents show that there was not only wrongdoing in the run up to the lane closures, but a concerted, months-long cover-up by members of Christie's inner circle. Governor Christie's allies were aware of the public safety hazards caused by their scheme and did nothing to stop it. If Christie didn't know about the lane closures it's because he didn't want to — plain and simple."

Michael Czinn, Press Secretary Democratic National Committee

This Thursday [today], I plan on calling the Senate into session to establish a special committee that will specifically examine the lane closures on the George Washington Bridge. This would be a bipartisan committee with subpoena power... There are still more questions than answers and we cannot rest until we know exactly what happened in Fort Lee. We plan to work collaboratively with our Assembly colleagues and the committee they have created to get to the bottom of this as soon as possible."

Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3rd, Gloucester)

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