

[www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/chi-kass-24-apr24,0,7276885.column](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/chi-kass-24-apr24,0,7276885.column)

**chicagotribune.com**

## **Chicago a longtime host to Outfit puppet show**

John Kass

April 24, 2009

Deputy U.S. Marshal John Ambrose sat in federal court on Thursday to hear lawyers portray him two ways:

An honorable screw-up hoping to impress an Outfit-friendly father figure, or a criminal conduit to reputed Chicago mob boss John "No Nose" DiFronzo.

Either way the jury decides, the relationship between the U.S. marshal's office and the FBI is at best icy these days, though they won't formally admit it. But you could see the two tribes in the gallery in U.S. District Judge John Grady's courtroom, sitting stiffly as if in church at a wedding, the in-laws glaring, already at war.

The marshals in their street clothes, shoulders hunched, not happy, sitting behind their man Ambrose. The FBI agents and prosecutors impassive, across the aisle, sitting behind their team.

The cause of the deep freeze? Ambrose himself.

Ambrose has been charged with leaking extremely sensitive information to the mob about the most important federal witness in Chicago's history -- turncoat Outfit hit man Nicholas Calabrese. And with lying about it to federal agents until he later confessed to the FBI about what he'd done.

But according to his lawyer Frank Lipuma, all Ambrose really confessed to was screwing up, bragging to a family friend that he was protecting a major Outfit witness.

Ambrose's friend was William Guide, a former crooked cop with Outfit connections, who spent time in prison, convicted with Ambrose's father, Thomas, in the Marquette 10 police drug dealer shakedown scandal.

What Ambrose said about Calabrese ended up in recorded prison conversations beginning in January 2003 between Mickey Marcello and his Outfit boss brother Jimmy.

What also came out during the trial is that Ambrose apparently thought that by leaking a little information, he could win favor from the Outfit and use their street network as a source of information to find fugitives.

At least, that was his story as told to senior FBI agents Anita Stamat and Ted McNamara when they finally caught him in 2006.

The International Olympic Committee might not know this, so don't tell them, but Chicago has a history of law enforcement conduits to the mob. The job has been held by many -- a patrol officer in the

evidence section, hit men in the Cook County Sheriff's office, even the chief of detectives of the Chicago Police Department.

Since the time of Paul Ricca, the Outfit has had puppets, in politics, on the bench, in business and law enforcement. That's how it survives, while politically unsophisticated street gangs suffer legal troubles. And what was so unique about Ambrose is that he was a federal law enforcement officer guarding a federal witness.

"He screwed up ... shot his mouth off," said Lipuma, a former federal prosecutor himself, in a riveting closing argument, full of passion, trying to poke holes in the case. "John Ambrose admitted he broke policy. He broke procedure. It may have been a violation of policy. ... But he's an honest man."

Prosecutor Markus Funk was once the new guy on the federal organized crime team. But now he's the veteran, with the most significant convictions in Chicago history under his belt: Jimmy Marcello, Joey "The Clown" Lombardo and others from the Family Secrets trial.

"This is straightforward theft," Funk told the jury. "The defense is throwing up these vast smoke screens to confuse you. He confessed. Not once, not twice, but three times. He shot his mouth off? There was no criminal intent? He admitted it. That's not a legal defense. That's a crime."

The defense also brought my column up again, the one of Feb. 21, 2003, that broke the story that Nick Calabrese had disappeared from prison and speculated (correctly) that he was in the witness protection program.

Lipuma said the column was the "linchpin" of the defense because after it ran, Calabrese's cooperation was common knowledge. But a month before the column was published, Jimmy and Mickey Marcello were already talking about Calabrese's federal "baby-sitter" funneling information to them.

If Ambrose were, say, a plumber, you might excuse him for screwing up and talking about a federal witness to an Outfit messenger boy.

A plumber might be excused, because a plumber wouldn't be expected to know about witness protection. But Ambrose is no plumber, is he?

He's a deputy U.S. marshal.

For now.

[jaskass@tribune.com](mailto:jaskass@tribune.com)

Copyright © 2009, [Chicago Tribune](http://chicagotribune.com)