



## Department of Investigation

### *Press Release*

Release #035-99

### **DOI ARRESTS 3 MANHATTAN RESTAURANT OWNERS FOR BRIBERY IN UNDERCOVER PROBE OF HEALTH VIOLATIONS**

TUESDAY, JUNE 29, 1999 -- EDWARD J. KURIANSKY, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (DOI), today announced the felony arrest of three Manhattan restaurant owners, APOSTOLOS TIGANIS, LUCIEN BAHAJ, and ROGER CASTRO, for paying bribes to DOI investigators posing as Department of Health (DOH) inspectors. The payoffs, which ranged from \$50 to \$150, were allegedly made to avoid the issuance of summonses for such Health Code violations as mouse droppings, cockroach infestation, uncovered food, and handling food with bare hands.

Commissioner Kuriansky said, "These arrests are part of DOI's ongoing effort to deter municipal corruption and should serve as a stern warning to any citizen who might be tempted to bribe a City worker. In each case, the DOH inspector immediately reported the attempted payoff to DOI. The actions of these officials are to be applauded. They typify the honesty and integrity of the overwhelming majority of City employees."

The facts and circumstances leading to each arrest are summarized below:

1) On December 14, 1998, a DOH inspector conducted an inspection of Jumbo's Pizza, located at 964 Amsterdam Avenue, Manhattan, and met with the owner, APOSTOLOS TIGANIS. After the inspector pointed out several violations, including rodent activity and the absence of a working thermometer in the restaurant, TIGANIS offered her a bribe not to issue any violations. The inspector rejected the offer and reported the matter to DOI.

As part of its undercover operation at Jumbo's Pizza, DOI sent an officer posing as a DOH inspector back to the location on April 14, 1999, to conduct a follow-up inspection. While there, the undercover met with TIGANIS. After the DOI undercover pointed out certain violations, such as uncovered food, unshielded lights, and cockroach activity, TIGANIS offered and paid him \$115 not to issue any Health Code violations.

2) On November 12, 1998, a DOH inspector was conducting a pre-operational inspection at Lucien's Restaurant, located at 14 First Avenue, Manhattan, and met with the owner, LUCIEN BAHAJ. During the course of the inspection, the inspector pointed out such violations as rodent and vermin activity, cold food being stored above the mandated temperature, and ashtrays in a smoke-free area. BAHAJ then offered the inspector approximately \$50 not to issue any violations. The inspector refused the offer and contacted DOI. On March 25, 1999, DOI sent an undercover agent, posing as a DOH inspector, to the

restaurant to conduct an inspection. While there, the DOI undercover pointed out such violations as mouse droppings and uncovered food to BAHAJ, who then offered and paid the undercover \$100 not to issue any violations.

3) On May 14, 1999, a DOH inspector was conducting an inspection at Starrett Restaurant, located at 601 West 26 Street, Manhattan, and met with the owner, ROGER CASTRO. During the course of the inspection, CASTRO asked the inspector if he could give him "something" in connection with the inspection. The inspector rejected the offer, completed the inspection, and reported the incident to DOI. On June 3, 1999, DOI sent an undercover investigator, posing as a DOH inspector, to Starrett Restaurant. At the restaurant, the undercover officer met with CASTRO and pointed out several violations, including cockroach activity and the staff's use of bare hands while handling food. CASTRO then offered and paid the undercover \$150 not to issue any violations.

TIGANIS, 45, of Manhattan, BAHAJ, 54, of Manhattan, and CASTRO, 56, of Bayside, Queens, were each charged with Bribery in the Third Degree, a Class D felony punishable by up to 7 years in prison. In addition, DOI will refer the matters to DOH for administrative action to revoke their restaurant operating permits.

The investigations were conducted by Kyle Sturcken, DOI's Inspector General for the Department of Health, and members of his staff, including Assistant Inspector General Bradley Howard, Special Investigator John Reatz IV, and Confidential Investigator Steven Montague.

The Office of Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the cases. Assistant District Attorney Lee Llambelis, of the District Attorney's Special Prosecutions Bureau, is handling the matters.