

Lillo eyes own trial

"Sopranos" screw-up Lillo Brancato and his alleged accomplice in the shooting death of a cop are likely to be tried separately if statements they made to investigators after their arrests are allowed into evidence, a Bronx judge said yesterday.

Judge Steven Barrett has yet to rule on whether to allow the statements as evidence. But he said at a hearing at Bronx Supreme Court that if he does allow them, Brancato and co-defendant Steven Armento would likely be tried separately on murder charges. They are accused of the Dec. 10 shooting of Police Officer Daniel Enchautegui.

Brancato told cops he didn't know Armento had a gun when they went to a friend's house to get some drugs, according to court papers.

Brancato's lawyer, Mel Sachs, said after yesterday's hearing he wants the actor's statements — which he claims were made under duress because he was in too much pain and was on medication after being shot by Enchautegui — knocked out of evidence.

Denise Buffa

Ex-wife rips KISS's pal

A former manager of the rock band KISS, who spent 10 years on the lam rather than pay a \$2 million alimony and child-support tab, was hauled into Manhattan Family Court in handcuffs yesterday, where his ex-wife testified against him.

"Have you received any money from the respondent whatsoever [since 1994]?" lawyer Jacqueline Bukowski asked client Rita Hilsen.

"No," answered the frail ex-wife, who has lived in an Upper West Side homeless shelter for 11 years.

Ex-hubby Jesse Hilsen, 65, has been in jail for two years for failing to pay support and for contempt.

The deadbeat dad was the former shrink of Paul Stanley, guitarist for the legendary hard-rock band. On Stanley's recommendation, he managed KISS from 1988 to 1992, earning up to \$500,000 a year.

Laura Italiano

Outrage over 'Big Dig' death

BOSTON — Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney called for the dismissal of the head of the \$14 billion "Big Dig" yesterday after part of a tunnel ceiling collapsed, killing a woman and rekindling questions over its safety.

Faulty steel beams gave way and a ceiling panel fell on a car at 11 p.m. Monday. A woman in the car was killed.

The accident in the Interstate 90 connector tunnel was the latest problem to mar the Big Dig, the nation's biggest public-works project.

Romney said his office had begun legal steps to remove the head of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, Matt Amorello, whose agency oversees the project.

Reuters

COPS: GAS GRIFT A PREMIUM CON



PETROL MEN: Suspects Eduard Gladyshev (above) and Alexander Tkach are escorted from the 84th Precinct yesterday.

N.Y. nails 2-state fuel-smuggle ring

By DAN MANGAN and ALEX GINSBERG

A brazen bunch of Brooklyn bootleggers were busted yesterday on charges of smuggling gasoline from New Jersey to New York — driving away with tankfuls of illicit profit, authorities said.

The gas grifters allegedly avoided paying higher taxes and sold regular gas as high-octane premium to unsuspecting gas stations. And they padded their pockets even more by charging Brooklyn and Long Island gas stations for more fuel than they actually delivered, authorities said.

The eight men arrested — ringleader Eduard Gladyshev, 28; Alexander Tkach, 53; Paul Zukowski, 39; Oleg Stoma, 38, and four drivers — were swept up in the first phase of a crackdown dubbed "Petrograd" targeting area gas-smuggling rings, according to sources.

The state Tax Department and

Attorney General Eliot Spitzer began investigating the ring in March 2005.

The smugglers' three trucks routinely brought in 10,000 gallons of gas a day to the Empire State. The scam netted about 30 cents per gallon in pure profit, and millions of dollars over the decade it's believed to have been in operation.

"It's a ton of money," said a source. "Pennies turn into millions."

But the ring sometimes played rough, prosecutors charged. In one case, the ringleaders hired men to beat up a driver who was trying to leave and work for someone else, slash his tires and pour sugar in his gas tanks.

The eight men and six companies they established to operate the scheme were named in a 202-count racketeering indictment filed yesterday in Brooklyn criminal court.

Zukowski's lawyer, Jeffrey Schwartz, said: "Most of these



charges are, in my opinion, pure garbage."

Spitzer's office, which is prosecuting the case, seized \$300,000 in cash and the smugglers' trucks. A gun was found in Tkach's home.

Gladyshev, who was convicted in 1999 of gun possession, lives in an \$800,000 house in Brooklyn and has a \$1 million condo in Miami, sources said.

Tkach owns property and has bank accounts in Switzerland, Luxembourg and Belgium, the sources added. The other two own their homes with no mortgages.

Gladyshev ring bought gasoline from the three major fuel terminals in Newark, Linden and Perth Amboy — where state taxes are nearly 22 cents less per gallon

than across the river in New York.

Then its members would file false paperwork claiming they were transporting the gas to Jersey retail outlets, but would instead drive their tankers to New York, where they would sell it to roughly 50 independent filling stations in Brooklyn and Long Island at New York State prices.

Sources said the scams were exposed by an honest retailer who realized that competitors were buying from smugglers. That retailer contacted Thomas Stanton, the head of the state Tax Department's enforcement division, who oversaw the probe with his deputy Paul Rossi and state Organized Crime Task Force chief Christopher Prather.

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