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### Nightclub figures getting lawyered up

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October 5, 2007

At Chicago's high-end nightspots like Reserve and RiNo, where they pour \$800 bottle-service champagne for big spenders and women who find such men irresistible, there are many fairy tales.

This isn't a fairy tale, but I'd love to write the screenplay.

Two of Chicago's top criminal lawyers -- Edward Genson and Joseph "The Shark" Lopez -- have been retained by a former club owner and a City Hall building inspector as a joint federal and city inspector general's investigation continues into the bar business and City Hall occupancy permits, which determine how many spenders can be legally packed into one nightclub.

At least one Rush Street bar manager is cooperating, wearing a wire in conversations with city employees, said a source familiar with the case.

This may explain why city Inspector General David Hoffman, a former assistant U.S. attorney, has fallen out of favor with Mayor Richard Daley's administration.

When Hoffman's probe into the Buildings Department began months ago -- and when he brought in the feds -- the mayor's aides viewed him as a threat, even though Daley hired him in a public display of anti-corruption gusto.

Genson represents former Reserve and Crescendo nightclub owner Anthony Demasi, a Michigan lawyer who mysteriously got into the high-end club scene while in his 20s to open two of the hottest places in town.

Lopez represents veteran City Hall building inspector Anthony Boggia, known in political circles and at Tavern on Rush as "Bojo." Boggia's name appears on multiple Buildings Department documents relating to Demasi's former nightclubs.

Neither Boggia nor Demasi has been charged with any crime. But that doesn't mean nerve endings from City Hall to Rush Street aren't jangling like a bookie's phone before the weekend. Boggia and Demasi are fountains of knowledge. The feds have a great thirst.

"You can tell you've struck a nerve by the caliber of attorneys being hired," said a source familiar with the investigation. "That's always an indicator."

Lopez said he has known Boggia for years.

"There are no charges. But it's always nice to have a lawyer," Lopez said. "It's like having a spare tire for your car. You never know."

Meanwhile, Demasi is fighting on several legal fronts at once. He was extremely successful in the club business, with a flair for public relations and top service, leasing white tigers and models and partnering with liquor companies. Reserve and later Crescendo were constantly packed with high rollers, from traders to pro athletes willing to spend thousands a night for VIP treatment.

Demasi got into trouble when he allegedly co-mingled funds from his investment corporation, Tsunami Capital. That put him in the center of a multimillion-dollar federal fraud case. In April the federal Commodity Futures Trading Commission filed a civil suit against Demasi. His assets were frozen. Suddenly, Demasi was broke. No investment company, no bars.

Under financial pressure, Demasi tried to leverage his nightclubs for a high-interest loan from banker Joseph Cacciatore and C&V Investments, violating a judge's order, according to court filings. In July, Cacciatore seized Demasi's clubs. Calls to C&V Investments were not returned.

Crescendo, 222 W. Ontario St., remains shuttered. But Reserve, 858 W. Lake St., has magically reopened. On Thursday morning, I met the new manager, a kid in his early 20s with shaved arms. He said his name is Jimmy.

Jimmy, who owns this place?

"I gotta go," Jimmy said, running away. "I'm busy. I can't talk. I can't say anything."

Demasi is out, with no friends, except for the Loquercio brothers, Tony and Robert.

Robert Loquercio owns Northside Toyota and Elgin Toyota. He recently entered into a \$9 million contract with Daley to provide hybrid vehicles for the now ostentatiously green City Hall.

"John, I just love your column," Loquercio said. "Are you going to make me famous?"

Sure. How do you know Anthony Demasi?

"He's my brother's roommate," Loquercio said. "We have a casual, friendly relationship."

Did you hire Eddie Genson for Demasi?

"Absolutely not," Loquercio said.

Since they were friendly, I asked him to have Demasi call me, and he did.

"I'd like to tell the readers of your column that I'm trying to do what's right, to reopen Crescendo, and to do what's right for the investors," Demasi said.

"My life has been turned upside down. And people took advantage of me. I made some stupid mistakes, and they blew it wide open. I'm not a bad guy. And I'm going to clean up this city one step at a time, to tell the truth about the people who were greedy swine. Even if it means taking a shot in the chest. They threw me under the bus."

The only bus he should be thinking about is the federal bus -- the one where the first guy on gets the best seat.

So this is no fairy tale. But before it's over, I've got a hunch it'll be one heck of a story.