

GEORGE SASSOWER

~~ATTORNEY-AT-LAW~~

16 LAKE STREET
WHITE PLAINS, N. Y. 10603

914-949-2169

December 29, 1988

Inspector General
Office of Court Administration
270 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10007

Dear Sir:

In the December 27, 1988 issue of The Daily News, Messrs. Jack Newfield and Kevin McCoy wrote about patronage appointments that were made during the past two years.

Obviously, the information was obtained by the mandatory Office of Court Administration filings, pursuant to Judiciary Law §35-a, 22 NYCRR §26.2, and §36.3 -- "Statement of Approval of Compensation".

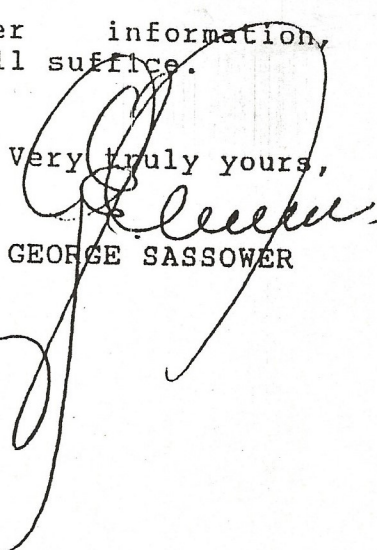
Feltman, Karesh, Major & Farbman, Esqs. and Rashba & Pokart received more than one million dollars (\$1,000,000) from the judicial trust assets of Puccini Clothes, Ltd., and as the annexed letter from Samuel Younger of your agency confirms, none of the mandatory reports have been filed.

Furthermore, although Puccini was involuntarily dissolved on June 4, 1980 -- more than eight (8) years, six (6) months ago -- not a single accounting has been filed, although your own rules provide that an accounting must be filed "at least once a year" (22 NYCRR §202.52(e)).

The court-appointed receiver is Lee Feltman, Esq., the senior partner of Feltman, Karesh, Major & Farbman, Esqs., and any report pursuant to 22 NYCRR §36.4 will reveal that neither Feltman nor his law firm did anything which inured to Puccini's benefit.

For any further information, including documentation, a simple request will suffice.

Very truly yours,


GEORGE SASSOWER

cc: Mr. Jack Newfield, The News
Mr. Kevin McCoy, The News



STATE OF NEW YORK
UNIFIED COURT SYSTEM
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT SUPPORT
(OFFICE OF COURT ADMINISTRATION)
80 CENTRE STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10013

ALBERT M. ROSENBLATT
Chief Administrative Judge

MATTHEW T. CROSSON
Deputy Chief Administrator

MICHAEL F. McENENEY
Director, Court
Operational Services

September 20, 1988

George Sassower
16 Lake Street
White Plains, NY 10603

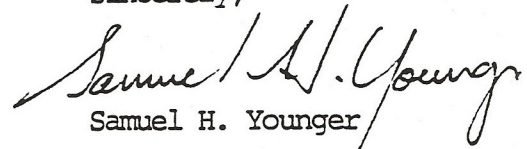
Re: Lee Feltman
Feltman, Karesh et al.
Rashba & Pokart

Dear Mr. Sassower:

In response to your letter dated August 30, 1980, a search of the records maintained by this office pursuant to Section 35-a of the Judiciary Law, indicates that there is no record of any Statement of Approval of Compensation forms filed by any of the above listed individuals or firms, between 1982 and the present.

If I can be of further assistance, do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,


Samuel H. Younger

SHY:rva

Ousted judge can tap pals' cash pipeline

By JACK NEWFIELD and KEVIN McCOY
Daily News Staff Writers

A Bronx judge ousted from office last year in a sex scandal has since been awarded four court-appointed guardianships by his former Bronx judicial colleagues, court records show.

Within two months of his ouster, Surrogate Bertram Gelfand was also picked for two guardianships in Brooklyn by his judicial counterpart in that borough, Surrogate Bernard Bloom.

The appointments are among scores of lucrative assignments given politically prominent lawyers by Surrogate and Supreme Court judges in 1987 and 1988.

A traditional patronage source, the appointments often pay thousands of dollars to lawyers chosen to manage estates or serve as guardians who represent the interests of individuals unable to handle their own affairs.

A Daily News review also found that:

■ Three former judges, who were disciplined by a judicial panel for offenses ranging from sexist remarks to accepting cut-rate vacations, received assignments

that paid a combined total of nearly \$7,000 in fees.

■ In some cases, the judges making appointments have chosen political associates, campaign contributors and active political figures.

■ The lawyers receiving assignments included Democrats such as Ronald Stringer, counsel to former Mayor Abraham Beame, and Republicans such as John Haggerty, counsel to Senate Majority Leader Warren Anderson.

■ Besides crossing party lines, the pattern of apparent cronyism transcends city geography, showing up in courts in all five boroughs.

"This again points out the

problem of having an elected judiciary," said Hank Henry, director of the Fund for Modern Courts and author of a 1986 study that showed a relationship between campaign donations to judges seeking office and subsequent Surrogate's Court appointments.

"When judgeships seem to be for sale or influenced by politics, public confidence in our system of justice is badly shaken," Henry added.

Discussing the assignments, several surrogates said they're required to choose guardians from a list of attorneys screened by the Office of Court Administration. While many on the list are active in politics or former colleagues on the bench, all are well-qualified, the surrogates said.

Ousted under cloud

Gelfand, who presided as Bronx surrogate from 1973 until July 1987, was ousted from the \$82,000 post after the state Commission on Judicial Conduct concluded he had harassed a former law assistant after she ended a rocky love affair with the

married judge.

The Court of Appeals ordered Gelfand's removal, citing his "evasive, incredible and false" testimony during the commission probe.

Two months after his ouster, Gelfand received the first of his appointments from Bloom. That initial award has since been followed by five more, another from Bloom and four from three of Gelfand's former Bronx colleagues—Supreme Court Justice Anita Florio and acting Supreme Court Justices Jack Turret and Bertram Katz.

Gelfand has not yet submitted accountings to be paid for five of the assignments, but has received \$2,000 for one of the Brooklyn appointments.

Numerous appointments

During his own judicial tenure, Gelfand gave appointments that paid a combined total of almost \$10,000 to Bronx Democratic Chairman George Friedman, Democratic district leader Gerald Esposito and Herbert Evans, a former state chief administrative judge.

He also appointed former



Bertram Gelfand

Appellate Division Judge Max Bloom (\$1,000); former Bronx Supreme Court Justices Alfred Callahan (\$1,000) and Donald Sullivan (\$3,500); former Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Nathaniel Helman (\$5,000); John McGoldrick, counsel to former Gov. Hugh Carey (\$9,000), and unsuccessful Bronx district attorney candidate Peter Rivera (\$4,200).

Gelfand, who is now a \$72,000 special assistant to Housing Commissioner Abe Biderman, did not return a call seeking comment.

Although relatively un-

See JUDGE Page 16.

516
496.8



Ex-judge can tap cash pipeline

JUDGE FROM PAGE 3

known attorneys also received dozens of appointments, many former officials and politically active lawyers packed the lists of assignments in each borough.

Manhattan

Manhattan Surrogate's Court, which has two judges and oversees estates and trusts worth billions, accounted for profitable assignments to lawyers such as Stringer, who received more than \$130,000 from 20 appointments, and C. Daniel Chill, counsel to former Assembly Speaker Stanley Steingut, who received \$40,000 from one assignment. Surrogate Marie Lambert named Lorraine Buckel, whom she backed for an unsuccessful Bronx surrogate's run last year, as guardian in 11 cases that paid more than \$144,000 in fees.

Vincent Catalfo, a fundraiser for Lambert's 1977 campaign, got 24 appointments, including one for the estate of actor Yul Brynner. His fees totaled more than \$150,000.

Judge Renee Roth, Manhattan's other surrogate, named former Brooklyn Surrogate Nathan Sobel, her mentor,

her 1982 campaign, to two appointments that paid \$34,500. Roth also named Michael King, a law partner of her 1982 campaign's chief political adviser, to three appointments that paid \$28,000. Former Rep. Bella Abzug, a Roth campaign donor, got an \$8,000 assignment.

Other Manhattan appointments went to Bernard Ehrlich, a lawyer convicted in the Wedtech corruption case (\$14,269); Bernard Cohen, a Manhattan Democratic club attorney (\$14,500), and Kevin Fogarty, a former Family Court judge (\$33,625).

A spokeswoman for Roth said the judge "picks the cream of the trusts and estates" lawyers, and has tried to expand the pool of appointees to add women and minorities.

Lambert did not return a phone call.

Brooklyn

In addition to Gelfand, Surrogate Bloom also appointed former Family Court Judge Stanley Gartenstein (\$1,400); former deputy Building Commissioner Blaise Parascandola (\$7,550); lobbyist-lawyer Peter Piscitelli (\$5,000); Kenneth Fisher, son of Democratic power Harold Fisher (\$2,000); election attorney Saul Rudes (\$500), and for-

mer Bronx Supreme Court Justice Alexander Chananau (\$1,000).

A spokeswoman said Bloom does not discuss his appointments.

Queens

Surrogate Louis Laurino chose former Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Anthony Jordan for a 1987 appointment and later approved a \$3,000 fee. Jordan was publicly reprimanded by the state Commission on Judicial Conduct in 1983 for calling a female attorney "little girl" during a court hearing.

Laurino also picked former Bronx Supreme Court Justice Joseph DiFede for an assignment and approved a \$1,400 fee. DiFede was admonished by the judicial commission in 1982 for accepting discount vacation trips from a man he had appointed as a receiver on property foreclosures.

Other Laurino appointments included former Gov. Malcolm Wilson (\$12,000); Patrick Rohan, dean of St. John's University Law School (\$5,000), and Fioravante Perrotta, a former city finance commissioner (\$16,500).

Laurino also appointed former City Councilman and GOP leader Jack Muratori (\$6,400); Terrence O'Connor, son of former Queens District

Attorney and Judge Frank O'Connor (\$5,600); former Manhattan Surrogate Millard Midonick (\$13,000), and former Appellate Division Judge Leon Lazer (\$3,000).

Laurino said his appointments went to attorneys chosen without regard to politics: "I don't discriminate against anyone."

Bronx

DiFede also received a Bronx guardianship and a \$650 fee from Supreme Court Justice Stanley Ostrau. In addition, Ostrau appointed former Bronx Civil Court Judge Martin Klein to two assignments that paid fees totaling \$1,875.

Klein was censured in 1984 for changing a signed ruling at the request of an attorney. Richard Biaggi, son of former Bronx Rep. Mario Biaggi, got a Bronx appointment in March 1987, a time in which he had been publicly described as a target of the Wedtech corruption probe.

He was indicted three months later, convicted in August and sentenced last month to two years in prison.

The appointment of Biaggi,

THE INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER
is on vacation.

who court records show has not yet been paid, came from Bronx Supreme Court Justice Louis Fusco. The judge himself is under investigation by Manhattan U.S. attorney's office over allegations he steered insurance business to a friend's firm.

Bronx Surrogate Lee Holzman, who succeeded Gelfand gave appointments to Lorraine Coyle, wife of Bronx Assemblyman G. Oliver Koppele (\$563), and Assemblyman elect Stephen B. Kaufman (\$1,050).

Holzman said he "does not discriminate for or against politically active attorney but has tried to avoid the traditional patronage system deciding assignments."

Staten Island

Surrogate Judge Charles Arrigo appointed Robi Gigante, law secretary of borough's Democratic Committee (\$1,725), and borough GOP Chairman George H. (\$7,225). He also gave appointments to some of 1981 campaign donors, including John G. Hall (\$2.5), Charles A. Nolan Jr. (\$2.5), Calmin S. Sharfstein (\$2.1) and William J. Frew (\$2,625).

D'Arrigo did not respond to a message left at his chamber.