

CHICAGOLAND

April Fools' joke backfires on security guard at O'Hare

By Abdon M. Pallasch
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

■ Tapes shed light on Feb. 9 jet skid-landing at O'Hare. **Page 11.**

The ban on jokes at the airport security checkpoint "works both ways," says a spokesman for Northwest Airlines.

A security guard who jokingly threatened to handcuff a 16-year-old passenger at O'Hare International Airport on April Fools' Day has been fired and more heads may roll, he said.

Scores of passengers have been arrested for joking about having bombs in their luggage, but airport officials say they don't

remember a security guard making such a joke before.

Peter Andriukaitis, a 16-year-old sophomore at Oak Park-River Forest High School was with his mom, Suzanne, heading to Charleston, S.C., for his grandfather's 75th birthday party on April 1.

In his bag, he had a laptop computer he was bringing to help with homework during the vacation, he said.

"I put it on the conveyor belt,"

Worker loses job for threatening teen

Andriukaitis said Thursday. "I didn't reach for the bag. He did. Yes, 'Is that your bag?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'How old are you?' I said, 'Sixteen.'"

"I said, 'What's the problem here?' 'Suzanne Andriukaitis said. 'The guard said, 'There's a problem with this bag, ma'am.'"

"He turned to one of the other security guards and said, 'Do you have your cuffs?' Peter Andriukaitis recalled the guard saying,

"Can you step over here and put

your hands behind your back? I did that. I could feel the other security guard right behind me."

"I was panicking totally and thinking this is the end of life as we've known it," his mom said. "I thought, if there was something in there, they planted it. I've seen stories about this on TV where things like this happen to people and it changes their lives forever."

Then, as quickly as it started,

the officer said, "April Fools" and let them go.

"I said, 'We've got a plane to catch,' so we just walked to the plane, very nervous, for the rest of the trip," he said.

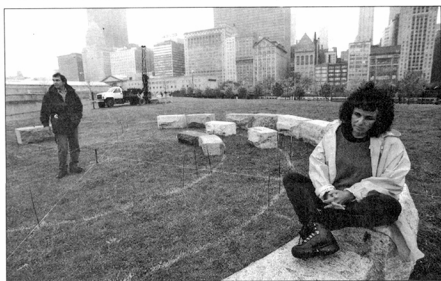
Five days later, when they returned to O'Hare, Suzanne Andriukaitis stopped at the security desk and asked for the number of the head of security for the private firm, International Total Services, that contracts with Northwest Airlines to handle security.

Security officials, airline officials and city officials were

shocked to hear her story, she said.

The guard who held the handcuffs but did not speak admitted they had played the joke on several passengers that day. He was fired, said Jon Austin, a spokesman for Northwest. The security firm is still trying to figure out which one of the guards did all the talking, Austin said.

The city's Department of Aviation reported the one investigation, said spokesman Dennis Culloton.



Tribune photos by José Moré

Artful endeavor: Brazilian artist Denise Milan (above) rests on a granite block Thursday while fellow Brazilian artist Ay Perez surveys the layout for their sculpture, "Americas' Courtyard," which they are installing near Monroe Street and Columbus Drive. The sculpture, consisting of four concentric circles and symbolizing a harmonious partnership among the Americas, will be on display through October.



Grand jury targets bingo parlor

By Ray Gibson
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

A federal grand jury is investigating whether a reputed Chicago organized crime figure and a former city Republican committeeman skimmed cash from a west suburban bingo parlor, it was learned Thursday.

A spokesman for the Illinois Department of Revenue, which regulates the charitable bingo industry, said the agency is cooperating with the probe of operations of a bingo hall at 121 Grand Ave. in unincorporated Northlake.

The investigation by the organized crime section of the U.S. attorney's office, is focusing on whether reputed mob figure James Cozzo and William Shilka, a convicted ghost pay-roller and former GOP ward committeeman, skimmed cash from the operations, according to lawyers familiar with the case.

Neither Cozzo, who was ousted from his leadership role with a Teamsters Union local in 1990 because of alleged organized crime ties, or Shilka could be reached for comment.

Cozzo is also under investigation in Miami over his role as the operator of a Curacao luxury hotel and casino that went bankrupt in 1987. Sources say the local probe is attempting to determine if any cash generated by the bingo parlor was sent to the Caribbean casino operation.

Records of the bingo parlor's operations have been subpoenaed as part of the federal investigation, according to the lawyers knowledgeable about the investigation.

Shilka, the 33d Ward GOP committeeman in the 1980s, was among a group of Chicagoans who invested in Cozzo's casino. Other investors included former Chicago Parks Supt. Ed Kelly, Chicago's best-known politician, Milto, and Island Lake trustee Fred Bigham.

Federal investigators are trying to determine what role Cozzo played in the bingo hall that opened in 1994. State records show a firm called Grand Palace Inc. originally rented its hall to 11 posts of the Italian American War Veterans Memorial Hospital, which ran the rames, he said.

Randazzo said revenue generated by the games run by the veterans group, "... all goes to veterans' causes, Children's Memorial Hospital, Shriner's Hospital."

He said last year the AWV also gave \$10,000 to the victims of an apartment fire in nearby Northlake that killed three people.

Earlier this year, an employee of the hall was robbed at gunpoint as he left the bingo hall at 2 a.m. with the night's receipts totaling \$30,000. When the employee resisted, the gunman struck him with a revolver and fled with the cash. No arrests have been made in the incident.

records in the 1980s that organized crime had taken control of some of the bingo halls.

Fred Randazzo, whose Post 1 of the Italian American War Veterans runs Sunday night bingo games at the Northlake area hall, said his group rented it from a group that included Cozzo, Shilka, and others until about a year ago. The rental fees have not been disclosed, and the group later sold its interest in the bingo operation to individuals associated with the veterans' organization, which continues to run the games, he said.

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Tribune staff writer Andrew Meron contributed to this report.

CIRCUIT CITY