

These Sopranos are Singing Baritone

By Reg P. Wydeven
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The Mafia has been entrenched in American popular culture since its rise to prominence in the United States in the early 1900s. The lives of mobsters has been glamorized by movies and television and even light beer commercials – “How you doin’?”

The wise guys portrayed in these depictions of the Mafia lifestyle are men’s men – they drive the biggest, most expensive Cadillacs, they wear extremely fancy clothes adorned with lots of gold jewelry, they talk and act tough yet they love their mothers.

Even though mobsters have more exciting worries than mortgages or paying for kids’ braces, such as the cops, snitches, and customers/protectees that fail to pay up, apparently they do share some of the same worries as regular guys, namely, erectile dysfunction.

The FBI recently arrested three doctors from the Westchester suburbs of New York City for allegedly illegally providing large quantities of Viagra, Cialis, Levitra and other prescription drugs and drug samples to members of the Gambino crime family.

Arlen Fleisher, Stephen Klass and George Shapiro each face up to 10 years in prison for supplying the men with the drugs for over two years. The doctors provided the drugs to Gregory DePalma, the Gambino family capo, and to his ‘crew’ in exchange for various favors, such as discounted prices for construction and auto repair work, done by Gambino family-controlled businesses, and use of DePalma’s table at Rao’s Italian restaurant.

The FBI uncovered the doctors’ actions as a result of its and the U.S. Attorney’s office investigations into the Gambino family, including acting boss Arnold Squitieri and capo DePalma. The two offices shored up their case by using a wiretap and a confidential source.

But there’s not all bad news for aging men on the East Coast. Guys still feeling macho can make a short trip through the Holland tunnel over to Cape May, New Jersey, where a more than 30-year-old ban on Speedos has been lifted.

In the late 1960s the Victorian-themed resort town imposed a ban on “skintight, formfitting or bikini type” bathing attire on males over the age of 12. The ban came as no surprise for a town that used to require that men and women swim at different times of day, wearing heavy woolen, no skin exposing swimsuits. The town also repealed a law that precluded bare-chested men from strolling along the beachfront promenade.

Although the law had been on the books for over thirty years, few residents or tourists were aware of it because it was rarely enforced. Accordingly, men strolling around in teeny-weeny bikinis were a common sight.

Although the ban has been lifted, Speedo doesn’t expect a huge increase in demand. While the skimpy men’s suits are probably the Los Angeles-based company’s most famous (or infamous) product, sales of the brief-style suits make up only 1% of Speedo’s annual sales.

Plus, there’s even more good news for those Speedo-wearing men with gray chest hair. In an effort to reduce budget deficits, the Bush administration announced that beginning in 2006, under the Medicare prescription drug law, the U.S. government will cover erectile dysfunction drugs for senior citizens.

Now that the FBI has tightened the screws on their Viagra business, maybe the mob will be expanding its operations into black market Medicare prescription drug cards.

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