

# 3 accused of stealing USD 108 million Tropicana player list

Three former Tropicana employees – including a high-ranking executive – were indicted yesterday on charges they stole a list, valued at USD 108 million, of more than 20,000 of the casino's top players.

One of them, John Conklin, is now the vice president of relationship marketing at Borgata – Atlantic City's trendy casino. He made his mark at the Tropicana by luring sports stars and celebrities, according to people who knew him there.

The case provides a window into the high-power world of casino marketing, where lists of top players can mean big money. Marketing executives, whose job it is to schmooze high rollers, are typically precluded from taking lists with them when they move onto other casino jobs. Often they don't need to – they keep their own records and gamblers also know how to reach them.

In this case, authorities said the three downloaded the identities of more than 20,300 patrons – including addresses, phone numbers and casino ratings – onto three separate discs labeled „Bette Midler.“ The Tropicana put the value of the information at more than USD 108 million.

„We charge that these marketers stole one of the most valuable assets of the casino,“ Attorney General Anne Milgram said in a news release. „This type of corporate espionage and theft involving proprietary information is a very serious crime.“

The others indicted were Justin Litterelle, who later went on to work for Bellagio, one of the premier casinos in Las Vegas; and James DiMarco, who was trying to find a new job after losing his at the Tropicana. Each of the three charged face up to 10 years in prison and USD 150,000 in fines if found guilty

of the most serious charges.

Conklin's lawyer, John Donnelly, said it was „inappropriate to comment at this time.“ Calls to lawyers representing Litterelle and DiMarco were not returned. Borgata did not return a call.

At least one former casino executive said he was shocked by the allegations. Dennis Gomes, who hired Conklin while he was president of resort operations for Aztar, Tropicana's former parent company, said he „couldn't imagine John doing anything wrong, and I'm not going to believe it until I see more.

„John Conklin is one of the best slot player development executives in the entire industry,“ Gomes said. „He's the greatest salesman on earth.

Justice director Gregory Paw said the three employees were working together at the Tropicana three years ago when they began talking about finding other jobs. Conklin was Tropicana's marketing vice president. Litterelle served under Conklin as a marketing analyst.

Conklin allegedly told Litterelle to download a list of the casino's top players, saying it would be „future leverage“ that would help them bring gamblers with them when they found jobs elsewhere, officials said.

Conklin, a 47-year-old from Galloway, then went on to work for Borgata. Litterelle, a 26-year-old up-and-comer in the casino marketing world, moved to Las Vegas and took a job as a national marketing manager at Bellagio. He was there a little more than a year before he resigned voluntarily in November 2007, according to Gordon Absher, a spokesman for the Bellagio's parent, MGM Mirage.

DiMarco, 59, of Ocean City, eventually lost his job after the Tropicana's new owner slashed hundreds of jobs.

Conklin also is charged with witness tampering for allegedly having his attorney get Litterelle to sign a false affidavit.

Gomes said he first met Conklin while he was the casino boss of the Trump Taj Mahal in the 1990s. Conklin was a telephone salesman at the time.

„If the average guy sold 300 phones a year, he sold 300 a month,“ Gomes said.

Later, Conklin sold luxury boxes at Philadelphia's CoreStates Center, now known as the Wachovia Center. When Gomes moved to the Tropicana, he hired Conklin to work in player development.

Conklin made his mark using his sport connections to bring in sport stars and celebrities. Gomes said members of the Philadelphia Eagles were among Conklin's contacts. So were boxers. He also brought in Michael Jordan, Gomes said.