

COLUMN ONE

Secret tapes of a mafia insider

Informant in Mexican gang made recordings that tell a different story of his handlers.

By MATTHEW ORMSETH

In a city full of secrets, Ralph Guy Rocha kept more than most.

As a member of the Mexican Mafia, Rocha was pursuing a deal with a drug cartel in Mexico called La Familia. The cartel had proposed a trade: an unending supply of methamphetamine if the Mexican Mafia protected the cartel's leaders in U.S. prisons.

What no one in either criminal organization knew was that Rocha was an informant for the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, whose agents were using him as a walking tape recorder to monitor the negotiations as they unfolded.

But Rocha kept secrets from the agents, too. After a long day's work of making tapes for the federal government, he went home and made recordings of his own.

In the tapes, disclosed here for the first time, Rocha told a very different story from the one agents and prosecutors presented in a 2013 indictment alleging the Mexican Mafia and La Familia were entwined in a sinister, transnational alliance.

In his tapes, Rocha said his associates in the Mexican Mafia were so bumbling and dim-witted, they could not have pulled off the cartel deal had he not taken charge with help from his government handlers. And those agents and detectives were dishonest and unethical, he claimed, playing up the specter of the Mexican Mafia to justify their salaries and high-level assignments.

"The badder the monster got to be to have this new task force," he said.

Rocha's handlers in the ATF and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said they didn't exaggerate the danger of the Mexican Mafia, which they considered a significant [See Mexican Mafia, A10]



RANCHO PALOS VERDES' Seaview neighborhood continues to suffer damage from landslides. Edison shut off power to more than 200 homes there and in the Portuguese Bend neighborhood over the weekend.

Residents in landslide area feel increasingly helpless

With power shut off, many in Rancho Palos Verdes struggle to stay in their homes. Neighbors fear they will be next.

By KAREN GARCIA

With less than 24 hours' notice, Nikki Noushkam learned Sunday that Southern California Edison was shutting off power to her home indefinitely.

"I have to vacate my house that I have lived [in] for almost 20 years," Noushkam said during a special Rancho Palos Verdes City Council meeting Tuesday to discuss the latest blow to residents of the besieged community: losing electrical service due to unprecedented landslides that authorities fear could spark brush fires.

Noushkam is one of more than 200 homeowners in the Portuguese Bend and Seaview neighborhoods whose power was shut off by Edison over Labor Day weekend. She and her neighbors are now struggling to continue performing daily tasks — cooking meals, taking showers, doing laundry — with no certainty when utilities will once again be switched on for good.

Noushkam feels frustrated and helpless as she scrambles to save [See Landslide, A5]



CARS TRAVEL on a cracked Palos Verdes Drive South last week. The ground under the city is moving at an average of 9 to 12 inches per week.

WALLY SKALIJ Los Angeles Times

Harris embraces Oakland — and this time the feeling is mutual

MARK Z. BARABAK
REPORTING FROM OAKLAND

The first time she ran for president, Kamala Harris launched her candidacy with a splashy rally that filled downtown Oakland with more than 20,000 cheering supporters.

It was a wholehearted embrace of her birthplace and a nod to the city's aspirational history.

But the feeling wasn't necessarily mutual. For some — mindful that Harris decamped and made her name across the bay in San Francisco — the imagery rang hollow. It was like a seldom-seen relative showing up at a wedding to give an elaborate toast, then hornoring her way into the [See Barabak, A5]



THEN-Sen. Kamala Harris, with husband Doug Emhoff, at a 2019 presidential campaign rally in Oakland.

MARCUS YAM Los Angeles Times

Russia meddling in vote, U.S. says

Kremlin used Tennessee company to spread disinformation in 2024 election, authorities say. **NATION, A4**

Bird flu found in California herds

The most likely cause is interstate transfer of cattle, and the milk supply is safe, officials say. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

Beverly Hills urged to build

State officials say approval of a new hotel and apartment complex is moving too slowly. **BUSINESS, A6**

Weather
Sunny and very hot. L.A. Basin: 99/80. **B6**

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2 students, 2 teachers killed in shooting at Georgia high school

Suspect, 14, will be charged with murder as an adult, authorities say, after attack leaves nine others wounded.

By JEFF AMY

WINDER, Ga. — A 14-year-old student opened fire at a Georgia high school and killed four people on Wednesday, authorities said, sending students scrambling for shelter in their classrooms — and eventually to the football stadium — as officers swarmed the campus and parents raced to find out if their children were safe.

The dead were identified as two students and two teachers at Apalachee High School in Winder, about an

State colleges wary of campus jobs bill

Hiring undocumented students risks breaking federal law, UC and CSU say. Governor has to make decision.

By TERESA WATANABE

Jeffrey Umaña Muñoz, a Cal State L.A. graduate student, is at the precipice of a life-changing moment: the potential ability to get a campus job at one of California's public higher education systems, even though he was brought to the country illegally from El Salvador at age 2 and has no legal work permit.

But the passage last week of Assembly Bill 2586, which would allow the state's higher education systems to hire him and nearly 55,000 other undocumented college students in similar straits, has raised concerns at the University of California, California State University and California Community Colleges.

In letters sent to state officials, UC and CSU have expressed fear that the bill could cause them to run afoul of a federal law that bars employers from hiring undocumented people — putting at risk their students, their employees who would hire them and billions of dollars in federal funding.

"While we understand the motivations of AB 2586, the uncertainty and risk cannot be understated or ignored," Eric Bakke, CSU director of state relations, wrote in a June letter to the bill's author, Assemblyman David Alvarez (D-San Diego).

Gov. Gavin Newsom has until Sept. 30 to decide whether to sign or veto the bill; his office declined to comment. Hundreds of supporters are planning to rally at the state Capitol on Thursday to press him to support the bill, as California is home to 1 in 5 of the nation's undocumented college students. [See Campus jobs, A7]



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