

OBITUARIES

MICHAEL J. CORBITT, 60

# Bad cop turned life around

By Hal Dardick  
Tribune staff reporter

Michael J. Corbitt's life revolved around mob crime. He committed it, did time for it, helped FBI agents probe it and wrote about it.

Mr. Corbitt, 60, the former Willow Springs police chief who was convicted of taking part in the highly publicized 1982 murder of Dianne Masters, died of lung cancer Tuesday, July 27, in his Tampa home.

A three-time convicted felon, Mr. Corbitt eventually helped the FBI solve mob crimes. Then, with best-selling author Sam Giancana—the nephew of the infamous slain Oak Park mobster of the same name who helped Mr. Corbitt launch his criminal career—he wrote a book about his life

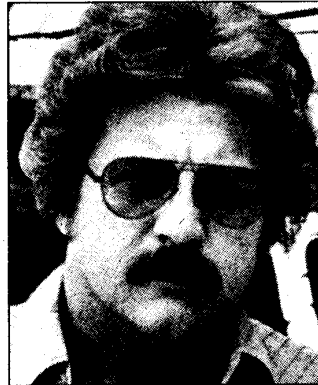
“He tried to turn around his life before he died,” said Francis Marrocco, a retired FBI agent who knew Mr. Corbitt as a young man and befriended him in recent years. “He tried to do what was right after all those years of doing wrong.”

The son of a poor factory worker, Mr. Corbitt was raised in Summit. When he was 14, he began hanging out with neighborhood toughs who occasionally hot-wired cars, according to his 2003 book, “Double Deal, The Inside Story of Murder, Unbridled Corruption and the Cop Who Was a Mobster.”

When he was a teen, mobsters got him a job at an appliance-repair company and then a gas station, both of which they used as fronts for criminal enterprises, his book states. At 19, mobsters allowed him to run his own gas station after he put up \$7,000 for the first gas delivery, but mob boss Giancana took away the station, the book states.

Giancana then referred Mr. Corbitt for a job as a police officer in Willow Springs, where the mayor got him drunk and swore him in at a tavern the first day he showed up, Mr. Corbitt wrote.

He soon took a higher-paying



Michael J. Corbitt

post as a police officer in Summit. From 1967 to 1971, he fired his weapon on duty three times, killing a peeping Tom and a man brandishing a gun in a bar and wounding a burglar.

Two years after going to Summit, he returned to the Willow Springs Police Department, where he was appointed chief in 1973. He left the position in 1982, after giving up a legal battle to challenge his firing by municipal government officials. It was the same year Masters disappeared.

Masters, the wife of attorney Alan Masters and a member of the Moraine Valley Community College trustee board in Palos Hills, disappeared on March 19, 1982. Her body was found nine months later in the trunk of a Cadillac that was submerged in the Sanitary & Ship Canal in Willow Springs.

Five months after being sent to prison for five years in January 1988 on extortion and racketeering charges, Mr. Corbitt, Alan Masters and a former Cook County sheriff's lieutenant were indicted for taking part in a plot to murder Masters' wife. All were convicted the next year, and Mr. Corbitt, who later admitted pushing Masters' car into the canal, was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

In about 1993, two years after his sentence was extended by two years on another conviction, FBI agents visited him in

prison and played a tape in which mob associates were overheard threatening to kill not only Mr. Corbitt, but also his young son Joey, who had Down syndrome, if he got in the way.

Giancana the author said Mr. Corbitt also faced more potential racketeering charges and as long as 60 more years in prison. That, and the threat to his son, convinced him to work undercover for federal agents, Giancana said.

Mr. Corbitt helped agents launch a crackdown on a mob-influenced union, prevent the murder of a Florida public figure and launch a probe of an international money-laundering operation, authorities later said.

For his cooperation, Mr. Corbitt was released from prison two years early in 1998. At the time of his death, he was working on a second book with Giancana that detailed his work for the FBI.

Mr. Corbitt came to regret his criminal years, Giancana said. “He was plain, he was clear, in saying he had no redeeming values while growing up. He said if he had it to do all over again, he wouldn't have taken that path.”

Nevertheless, Giancana believes history will not be kind to Mr. Corbitt. “He will always be tainted with the Dianne Masters case,” he said. “You can't ignore the fact that he participated in the murder of another individual. It's hard to redeem yourself from that.”

Mr. Corbitt had been married and divorced twice. He is survived by his wife, Sherry; four sons, Keith Lindstrom, Joey, Michael, Marc Jensen; a stepson Paul Jensen; a daughter, Mary Sue; a stepdaughter, Gina Hampton; three sisters, Terri Smith, Cecilia Garrett and Ellen Arfken; a brother, Tim; and two grandchildren.

Visitation will be held from 2 to 9 p.m. Sunday at Foran Funeral Home, 7300 Archer Ave., Summit. Mass will be said at 10 a.m. Monday in St. Joseph Church, 7240 W. 57th St., Summit.