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SOUTH BROOKLYN'S COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Something's Happening at the Piers

by Faiza Akhtar

Sabato Catucci, is a name that was part of a household topic in Red Hook five years ago. Mr. Catucci became well known in his fight against the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to keep his company American Stevedoring Inc. (ASI) in operation at the local piers. The seventy-something year old founder and CEO of ASI is now back in battle with the Port Authority to keep his company fully operational according to a complaint he and his attorney, Janine G. Bauer filed with the Federal Maritime Commission last year.

Mr. Catucci's extensively detailed complaint against the powerful Port Authority claims the agency forced his company to sign an unfair lease in duress. He also claims the agency stopped assisting ASI in April 2006 to present day from receiving much needed cross-harbor barge funding from the government as it ships containers from the Red Hook terminals to the ones it operates in Newark; Suggesting such an action has caused ASI to incur out of pocket costs of approximately \$450,000 per month, thus making their ability to pay the Port Authority rent difficult and at times impossible. Mr. Catucci's sworn affidavit lists several unfair business practices by the Port Authority such as the agency requesting interest of new port operators to take over ASI's operations. Mr. Catucci states this specific public request shook the confidence of his current and future customers and created a loss of \$11 million additionally to his company.

Summarizing the allegations by ASI, the document states the following: *"The Port Authority's actions in forcing American Stevedoring into a set of leases with exorbitant rent, reducing its space, refusing to sign the leases after forcing American Stevedoring to hastily execute them, obtaining the rent arrearages in the following*

last year or on the company's current position on the matter, citing ASI's long-term and on-going business relationship with the Port Authority as the reason.

Meanwhile, in the midst of an economic downturn and remembering the uphill battle to keep ASI in

operation back in 2007, it seems commercial Red Hook neighbors, several of whom do business with ASI, are questioning what is going on at the port operator's facilities as well since they hear the rumors and observe lesser and lesser activity at the terminal. Comments from business owners and employees were not attainable as many felt hesitant to speak on the record and risk upsetting their financial relationship with Mr. Catucci's company.



months, depleting the Harbor Mitigation Dredge Fund, and issuing the RFEI publicly announcing that American Stevedoring was going out of business, without cause, were part of the Port Authority's pre-conceived plan to create conditions under which American Stevedoring would fail."

A final decision by the maritime commission was scheduled for September 28, 2011 but according to the commission's assistant secretary Rachel Dickon, the decision has been delayed to spring of 2012 for now. Matt Yates, a spokesperson for ASI, couldn't comment on the complaint filed to the commission

Late last week, however, approximately 30 people gathered outside of ASI's gates claimed Mr. Catucci owed money to their union's pension fund and was considering stepping down as CEO. Several of the people in the crowd wore shirts identifying themselves as members of the International Longshoremen's Association, a union that has historically been at odds with Mr. Catucci based on various media reports and court filings.

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