

Man arrested in \$1.5-million heist at Bellagio casino - Los Angeles Times

Written by Administrator

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Anthony Carleo needed to ditch some "cranberries." Fast. And this week, authorities said, he found an eager buyer.

The man agreed to meet Carleo at the lavish

Bellagio casino, where in early December a gunman had swiped \$1.5 million in casino chips, including \$25,000 chips known as cranberries, and sped off on a motorcycle.

Las Vegas police say Carleo sold the man a \$25,000 Bellagio chip that Carleo said had been stolen. The next night, court papers said, Carleo sold the man four more.

When the man told Carleo he wanted to assemble a crew to rip off Las Vegas casinos, Carleo's reaction was blase, police said. He had already robbed the Bellagio, they said he told the man, who turned out to be an undercover officer.

Police arrested Carleo late Wednesday at the Bellagio — where he had been staying on and off since the theft — on suspicion of armed robbery and burglary. His bail was set at \$15,000, according to jail records, and he is scheduled to appear in court Monday.

Carleo, 29, is the son of local Municipal Court Judge George Assad. "I think it goes without saying that as a father, I am devastated and heartbroken to see my son arrested under these circumstances," the judge said Thursday in a statement.

Carleo once worked as a real estate broker in Colorado, public records show. He filed for bankruptcy in 2009, and in court papers said he was a full-time student with \$30 in his checking account and nothing in his savings. Among his possessions, court papers said, were a Taurus .40-caliber pistol and a 2007 black Suzuki motorcycle.

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"Money isn't everything," he wrote on his [Facebook](#) profile, "but it's right up there next to oxygen."

Court documents portray Carleo as a luckless gambler and a somewhat careless thief. On Dec. 11, he told a Bellagio poker dealer he would love to pocket some cranberries.

"Man, how easy would it be to rob a casino?" Carleo said, according to court papers.

"Dude, you watch 'Ocean's Eleven' too much. This is real life and that ... doesn't happen," the dealer reportedly said.

"Oh, no, it's not that hard. All you need is a black mask and a motorcycle, and I have a motorcycle," Carleo said, according to court documents.

In the wee hours of Dec. 14, a man entered the Bellagio wearing a white helmet that obscured his face. He waved a handgun at craps table No. 5 — shouting, "Get out!" to frightened gamblers — crammed chips into his fanny pack and dashed out of the casino and fled on a black motorcycle.

In the days after the heist, casino security experts said the thief's choice of bounty, chips ranging in denomination from \$100 to \$25,000, was foolish. Casinos track chips — in particular, high-dollar chips.

But court documents show that between the heist and Jan. 22, Carleo lost at least \$107,000 at the casino he is suspected of robbing — \$72,000 on [New Year's Eve](#) alone. He blew so much cash that the Bellagio provided him with free meals and hotel rooms for a number of days, court papers said.

It's unclear whether Carleo used any stolen chips or exchanged them for cash, but court papers said he had no apparent source of income.

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In late December, Bellagio owner MGM Resorts International announced it was discontinuing the casino's \$25,000 chips and that gamblers had until April to redeem them. By late last month, a poker player told the Bellagio about a fellow gambler trying to peddle the cranberries.

The gambler was also trying to sell them on an online poker forum, under the handles "Oceanspray25" and "cranberrykid25." He told a potential buyer by phone that his money was dwindling and he was "sitting there looking at all these \$25k chips that (he) can't cash," a court record said.

Soon after, police started the undercover operation.

After arresting Carleo, authorities searched his girlfriend's apartment. In her bedroom closet, court papers said, they found 16 cranberries.

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Times researcher Scott Wilson in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

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