

Hoboken blocks breast implant giveaway at local bar

By Amy Ellis Nutt
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

In 1998, it was a vacation cruise. Last summer it was a jet ski, then a mountain bike. And this past winter, it was a snowboard. A popular Hoboken nightclub, The Planet, was hoping to begin its newest promotion tonight: a breast implant giveaway. Depending on your point of view, the promotion (a second bar, River Street, was also going to participate) represented either a new high in creativity, or a new low in probity.

The city of Hoboken clearly thought the latter.

Wednesday night, after members of the city council expressed indignation about the bars' public relations ploy, Michael Acciardi, owner of River Street and director of operations at The Planet, decided to make a few phone calls.

"I spoke with the mayor (Anthony Russo), with Police Chief Carmen LeBruno, with the city administrator and with a member of the town council," said Acciardi. "And they all told me they thought it wasn't in the

best interest of the city. I don't want to put a black eye on them. I've made my living through Hoboken and I want to do what's best."

Which is exactly what Russo asked Acciardi to do.

"I appealed to him on a personal level when he called," said Russo after being told the promotion had been pulled yesterday. "I told him it was not in the best of taste, and he said he'd do the right thing."

The Planet had planned to begin a free breast implant contest tonight, ending Saturday, July 8. During the intervening four weeks, female patrons of both The Planet, which is owned by Acciardi's brother, Paul, and River Street could enter the contest simply by filling out an entry form and dropping it in a bucket. On July 8, a single name was to have been picked at random and awarded the augmentation operation.

"When you do a promotion, you want to build publicity," The Planet's general manager, Rocco John, said earlier this week, before the promotion was axed. "It's about standing out from the rest. I want to attract

more girls to my nightclub. Sex does sell."

Toward both these ends, John had signed up osteopathic physician Robert Agresti of Broadway Plastic Surgery in Wyckoff to perform the breast augmentation, gratis, on the winner. (Agresti did a three-year residency in plastic surgery at University Hospital in Ames, Iowa.) The cash value of the surgery, according to Agresti, who was unavailable for comment about the promotion's demise, is between \$6,000 and \$6,500.

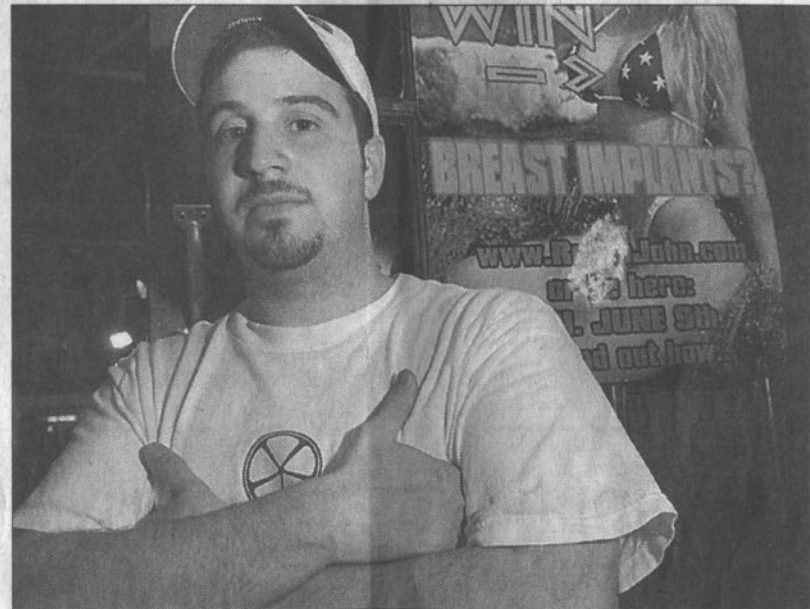
Interviewed earlier this week, Agresti said he has performed more than 500 breast augmentations during his nine years of practice as a plastic surgeon in New Jersey. He also said he had no qualms, ethical or otherwise, about providing a free medical service through a bar promotion.

"In fact, it would be shortsighted *not* to promote (myself)," he said. "More and more (plastic surgeons) advertise. That used to be taboo. It's now a competitive market . . . I'm not setting the stage for cosmetic surgery by participating. The plastic surgery

market is already there. Americans' images of themselves are already fixed in place. I provide a good service, and we're not going to handle this differently than any other patient."

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (Agresti is not a member) disagrees. According to its code of ethics, any surgeon who "participates in a charity raffle, fund-raising event, contest or other promotion in which the prize is any (plastic surgery) procedure" is subject to disciplinary action, even expulsion.

"The reason we have that (rule) is that the decision to perform surgery is a very special one, made between a physician and a patient," said Allen Rosen, chief of plastic surgery at the General Hospital Center at Passaic, assistant chief of the Department of Plastic Surgery at Mountainside Hospital and assistant clinical professor at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark. "We want to take all bias out of the decision-making to perform surgery, and there is no way to take the bias out if you've offered your services for free. Even with caveats, it just smacks



SAED HINDASH/THE STAR-LEDGER

Rocco John, general manager of The Planet in Hoboken, was going to hold a drawing for free breast implants until the city got wind of the idea.

of a conflict of interest."

As for Acciardi, he's clearly glad to be free of the headache. And for his

next promotion?

"Give away a bag of popcorn. That should be safe."