

Mob war erupts in Saugus

Wounding of reputed Mafia heir linked to Conn. slaying

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SAUGUS — The Mafia War has begun. First casualty: Reputed underworld lieutenant Francis P. "Cadillac Frank" Salemme, who survived a gangland hit yesterday morning in the parking lot of a Route 1 pancake house.

Second casualty: William Grasso, 62, found a few hours later floating in the Connecticut River with a bullet in his head. Grasso was confidante to Raymond "Junior" Patriarca of Providence, R.I., identified by the FBI as chief of organized crime in New England.

Patriarca hasn't been seen since the shooting began and federal agents are wondering whether he, too, is dead.

A source close to the investigation said Joseph "J.R." Russo, a powerful East Boston mafioso, met last week with organized crime figures in New York City and was given authority to "hit" Salemme, Grasso and Patriarca.

Providence police said the shooting and the murder are related.

Law enforcement sources said Salemme, 55, of Sharon, was set to take over La Cosa Nostra operations in Boston, but not without a fight from Vincent M. Ferrara, 40, of Revere, described in court documents as the organization's rising star.

Salemme was standing between two parked cars in front of the International House of Pancakes restaurant when at least three "Hispanic-looking" men pulled up in a blue Dodge Dynasty and sprayed him with bullets. Police sources theorized the failed assassins were a Colombian hit squad.

Struck in the chest and leg, the burly Salemme was in stable condition today at AtlantiCare Medical Center in Lynn, where relatives gathered at his side and security was tight.

Witnesses said the driver stepped out and opened fire on Salemme with a handgun, described as a .45 caliber semi-automatic. A waitress said a second man in the car's backseat leaned out a passenger-side window,



State Trooper Michael Conti readies a shotgun before joining the hunt for Saugus shooting suspects Friday morning.

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aimed a rifle and shot repeatedly.

"He had the gun up to his chin like this and was shooting, *da-da-da-da-da*," said the waitress, pantomiming the rifleman whom she called a "nice-looking guy" in his 30s.

"I didn't see them drive away," she said. "I went right down on the floor."

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CHRONOLOGY OF A 'HIT'

SAUGUS — The following is a chronology of the attempted execution Friday morning of reputed Mafia soldier Francis P. Salemme outside the International House of Pancakes on Route 1 south.

- 10:30 a.m. — A blue car pulled into the IHOP parking lot. Two gunmen — a driver wielding a handgun and a man in the backseat with an assault rifle — opened fire on Salemme who was about 20 feet from the entrance.

- 10:30 to 10:35 a.m. — Salemme, hit in the chest and leg, fled around the corner to a Papa Gino's restaurant.

- At about the same time — The gunmen sped away in their car through the adjacent parking lot and drove down Route 1, turning onto Route 99. Somewhere en route they got a flat tire and ditched the car in the parking lot of Trimount Bituminous Products Inc., located next to The Palace nightclub.

- 10:48 a.m. — A Life-Line ambulance took Salemme to AtlantiCare Medical Center in Lynn where he was admitted to the trauma center.

Salemme had a single entry hole in his chest near the heart, and an exit wound in the stomach. He also had a leg wound. Salemme, 55, was described as "well tanned and in good shape." Hospital officials were told by police to put on extra security. "This guy was meant to be killed," a police officer said.

- 11:15 a.m. — State police and K-9 units arrived at the Route 99 parking lot and began searching the nearby woods and going door-to-door on neighboring streets.

- Approximately noon — Salemme was wheeled into the operating room where he underwent exploratory surgery. After two hours, he was transferred to the intensive care unit.