



GREGG KOHL/ FOR THE DAILY NEWS

Vera Coking (left) has been fighting to keep her property (near flags in photo above) out of casino owners' hands for years. For now, she's succeeded. "Who named Donald Trump the king of Atlantic City?" said Coking's lawyer, Glenn Zeitz.

Just call her The Vera

A.C. woman enjoys victory over Trump

by Rob Laymon

For the Daily News

ATLANTIC CITY — In many ways, Vera Coking finally won the right to live in the past.

Coking stood briefly outside her house on Columbia Place yesterday, letting photographers get pictures of her raising her arms in mock jubilation.

Across the street from her lonely rooming house — the last still standing in a beach block here — car jockeys hustled autos from the Trump Plaza "pit."

Buses crowded her street. Bulldozers moved dirt for the landscaping of the new Wild West Casino. For blocks in every direction, dust from casino construction filled the air.

Yet, it looks like Coking, a 70-ish widow and grandmother, will stay put for a while.

On Monday, Coking knocked Donald Trump for a loop in state Superior Court.

The court ruled that the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority could not condemn her property and turn it over to the Trump organization for a limousine parking lot, as part of Trump's

Plaza's \$55 million expansion.

Judge Richard Williams said the condemnation would be "giving Trump a blank check" to future development on the property.

"Who named Donald Trump the king of Atlantic City?" Coking's lawyer Glenn Zeitz said, standing outside her home yesterday.

"The message is out that if you want to condemn someone's property, you'd better be real sure it's for legitimate reasons and not for some hidden agenda."

Five years ago, Coking and two nearby property owners — owners of a jewelry store and a mom-and-pop restaurant received notice of the condemnation.

Zeitz said Coking's property is worth at least \$1.2 million.

But Trump's highest offer was \$250,000, Zeitz said. Peter Banin, whose jewelry store was also threatened with condemnation, said he received an offer of \$225,000 about two years ago.

The ruling also spared Sabatini's Restaurant, at the corner of Pacific and Columbia Place.

Clare and Vincent Sabatini and Coking have rebuffed efforts to take their property for more than a

decade. But it was Coking alone whose house almost disappeared beneath construction of the never-completed Penthouse casino.

In the '80s, after she refused to sell to Bob Guccione, the Penthouse owner began building his casino around her. For years, a giant structure of steel beams made a cage around her house. And the beams stayed there, rust-

ing, long after Guccione was denied a casino license and abandoned his plans in Atlantic City.

Coking's house looks better now than it has in a long time.

Trump and CRDA attorneys have said only that they would consider an appeal of the ruling. Meanwhile, attorney Zeitz and others interpreted the ruling as a victory for the little property owner over the big corporate bully.

Coking herself spent much of the day in her house, refusing to talk to anyone.

Finally, in mid-afternoon, Zeitz guided the tanned woman out to the sidewalk for a photo op.

Asked if she planned to make a casino of her property, she only shook her head and smiled.

"She wants to leave a legacy of family, not gaming, to her daughters and grandchildren," Zeitz said. "Look, this lady still lives here and will continue to live here. Yet it would have been a parking lot for high rollers."

As he spoke, the limousines continued to roll past. ■



Trump

Troopers are party poopers

Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY — Twelve people were arrested after undercover agents sneaked onto a chartered "babes and booze" cruise that included female models, marijuana and alcohol, state police said yesterday.

Tipped by newspaper ads for the "2nd Annual Babes and Booze Cruise," plainclothes officers bought \$35-per-person tickets for the journey on the Captain Applegate, a 56-foot fishing charter boat unlawfully used as a cruise vessel, according to State Police spokesman John Hagerty.

The event, sponsored by "A

Special Event," a Pleasantville modeling studio, featured 15 female models, a four-man band and a two-person crew headed by Andrew Applegate III, 65, of Absecon, the owner of the boat, Hagerty said.

It left at 8 p.m. Monday from Gardner's Basin with 40 paying patrons aboard, and alcohol service began immediately, he said.

While the undercover agents mingled on board, other State Police operatives watched from marked police boats throughout the three-hour cruise.

As soon as the boat returned, police were waiting.

Seven people — including Ap-

plegate and his wife, Marilyn Applegate, 63, — were charged with aiding and abetting the sale of liquor without a license. One was charged with selling liquor without a license.

Four others were arrested on drug charges. They were Steven T. Moore, 36, of Egg Harbor Township; Tara M. Grosso, 18, of Egg Harbor Township; and Helen Theresa Vaspoli, 20, of Linwood, all of whom were charged with marijuana possession.

Robert Cherico, 42, of Linwood, was charged with possession of drug paraphernalia.

All were released on their own recognizance. ■