NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEW YORK POST, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2001

Rudy slips in Tony Soprano

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Richard Johnson

With Paula Froelich and Chris Wilson

MAYOR Giuliani has arranged a tentative truce between his friends **James Gandolfini** and **William Fugazy**, who has bitterly criticized "The Sopranos" as offensive to Italian-Americans.

Fugazy, head of the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations and a longtime Giuliani ally, grudgingly agreed to let Gandolfini sit at the dais at Fugazy's gala tribute to the mayor at the Sheraton New York on Wednesday.

"Rudy invited Gandolfini, who's his friend," Fugazy told us. "He's going to be at Rudy's table. He and I are too close to fight over it. If he wants him there, what am I gonna do?"

Fugazy, who has successfully barred cast members from "The Sopranos" from marching in the Columbus Day Parade for three years running, hates the show so much that he once refused to accept a bottle of wine sent over by Gandolfini at Elaine's.

"I wouldn't accept it," Fugazy said of the peace offering. "I'm no hypocrite. The big problem with the show isn't the mob stuff, it's the portrayal of the home life. They portray the Italian family as slobs and pigs and degenerates.

"A while back, Rudy tried to have me make up with them. I had a meeting with the chairman of HBO along with the Sons of Italy and other groups, to discuss why we thought they were hurting the image of Italo-Americans. They said they would try to do movie projects that would show different sides of Italo-Americans, but they never did that."

Fugazy says his loathing for "The Sopranos" has been a source of endless amusement for Giuliani.

"We laugh about it," Fugazy says. "He thinks it's funny that I don't like it. He loves it!"

Larry King will host the black-tie bash, which will feature an All-Star lineup of speakers and performers to include **Regis Philbin, Sen. John McCain, Tony Bennett, Bette Midler, Natalie Cole, Joel Grey** and opera singer **Michael Amante**.

Expected guests include **Muhammad Ali, Chazz Palminteri, Danny Aiello**, Police Commissioner **Bernard Kerik, Yogi Berra, Phil Rizzuto, Jerry Orbach, Chita Rivera, Jerry Stiller** and **Ann Meara, Mary Higgins Clark, Gay Talese** and **Curtis Sliwa**.

The tribute, originally planned as a bawdy Friars Club-style roast of Giuliani, was recast after Sept. 11 as a more somber benefit for the Twin Towers Fund and the Forum's Children Foundation, a nonprofit group that brings seriously ill Third World children to the U.S. for life-saving surgery.

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