

Former mob boss speaks to packed MU audience

By Jenna Youngs
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Michael Franzese knows when to stop, even if stopping means he could lose his life.

In front of a packed audience in Conservation Auditorium of more than 350 people — some of whom had to line the walls because every seat was filled — the former Columbo crime family mob captain compared a story about being pulled over by a police officer as a teenager to making a life-threatening decision to leave his mob family.

“I was an arrogant 18-year-old driving at 1 a.m., and I came to a stop sign,” he said. “What do you do at 1 a.m. when you come to a stop sign? I slowed down and rolled through it. There was a cop there. He says ‘There’s a stop sign, what do you do?’ I say, ‘Slow down.’ He says ‘You’re not hearing me. What does a stop sign say?’ I say ‘To me, slow down.’”

Franzese said the officer then told him to get out of his car and hit Franzese a few times with a nightstick.

“I try to act like a tough guy and he hits me a few times until I finally say stop,” Franzese said. “He says ‘Do you want me to stop or slow down?’ When you engage in dangerous activities, you should just stop. Don’t just slow down.”

Franzese’s father also was a captain in the mob, and though his father tried to prevent Franzese from joining, Franzese said he decided when his father went to prison to join the crime family and became a made man when he was 24.

Franzese’s business manager Robert Michaels said Franzese became one of the most financially successful “made” men in history.

Michaels, a former law enforcement agent in Norfolk, Va., said Franzese’s main reason for leaving the mob was an encounter with his future wife.

“Something caused him to walk away,” Michaels said. “She was a 19-year-old girl. She’s now been called the ‘woman who changed the face of organized crime.’”

Franzese said he was at the “top of (his) game” when he met his future wife on a film set in southern Florida.

“I never thought about walking away from my life,” he said. “Then I meet this girl and start thinking about how to get out.”



Photo/Brenden Neville

MU freshman Julia Gilmour receives a copy of ‘Blood Covenant: The Michael Franzese Story’ signed by author Michael Franzese on Wednesday in the Anheuser-Busch Natural Resources Building. Franzese is an ex-captain of the Colombo crime family based in New York.

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Franzese, who had been acquitted in five other major cases, pleaded guilty to racketeering and accepted a 10-year prison sentence. He said his wife convinced him to leave the family and he publicly said he was leaving the mob.

Franzese said a contract was put out on his life, but thinks he hasn't been killed in part because he never cooperated with authorities to implicate anyone else.

Franzese now travels the nation speaking with young adults about dangerous lifestyles, and takes special interest in speaking about gambling.

The athletic department, Wellness Resource Center, Keeping the Score program — a statewide program about gambling dangers — and the Missouri Students Association Department of Student Activities sponsored Franzese's speech.

Kristy Wanner, who works with the Wellness Resource Center in gambling education, said Franzese also spoke with athletes earlier Wednesday.

Franzese said its important for students to realize life can change and they could end up doing something different than they planned.

“At this point in your life you can be prepared to get into a career and something will change,” he said. “I had no idea I'd follow this path 12 years ago. You never know where life will take you. I am a person of faith and I believe God has a plan for me, and here I am today.”

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