

'Abused' University Club waitresses testify against 'groper' boss

By DAREH GREGORIAN

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It may look stodgy from the outside, but the storied University Club at Fifth Avenue and 54th Street was a hotbed of "relentless sexual harassment" for six young waitresses at the hands of their perverted, elderly, gnomelike boss, a Manhattan jury was told yesterday.

The women were groped by 5-foot-5 banquet captain Mel Guzman, 71, who would then dole out shifts depending on how they responded, lawyer Joshua Friedman said in the civil suit's opening argument.

"Guzman is between 20 and 45 years older than the plaintiffs, and they worked with his wife at the club, and they were married or in steady relationships," Friedman said.



STEVEN HIRSCH/SUSAN MAY TELL (INSET)

"[Yet] he is going to ask you to believe the plaintiffs desired him so badly that they initiated sexual contact with him. Where? In the elevator.

"Six women do not schedule rendezvous in freight elevators and ask the man to grope their breasts, buttocks and private parts through their pantyhose.

". . . It was a sickening abuse of power that left six women emotionally scarred."

But defense lawyer Daniel Hughes suggested that his client was set up.

"Is there a she-said, she-said conspiracy?" he asked, suggesting that the women joined hands to try to squeeze more money or work from the club.

Some, he added, "charged" cash after the 2005 encounters.

Friedman countered that the women didn't "charge" anything -- that, instead, after some of the grope sessions, Guzman "threw a few bills" at them to further degrade them.

Meanwhile, the club's lawyer, Janene Marasciullo, said the 100-year-old-plus institution handled everything properly. As soon as one woman, Marilyn Rivas, complained to the general manager, he investigated and suspended Guzman after he "admitted he touched some of these women, consensually."

Guzman "never set foot in the club again," Marasciullo noted, while, Rivas was promoted.



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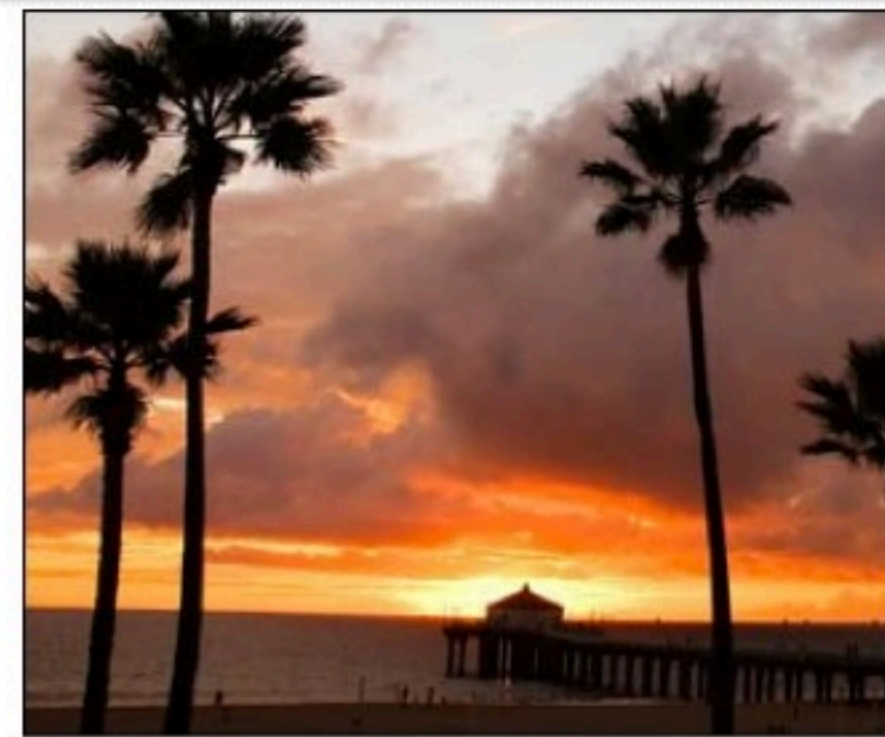


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took the stand as the first witness, she said Guzman constantly hit on her, even inviting her to a hotel.

His pickup line? She said he told her, "My penis doesn't work, but my mouth does."

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