

The Record (New Jersey)

SELLING A SYSTEM TO BEAT THE SYSTEM

MAN FIGHTS PARKING TICKETS

December 12, 2001

Section: NEWS

Edition: All Editions

Page: A1

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Caption: COLOR PHOTO - DANIELLE P. RICHARDS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER - Glen **Bolofsky** is an expert in N.Y.C. parking laws.

Whoever said you can't fight City Hall never met Glen **Bolofsky**.

The 45-year-old Fair Lawn resident has been doing it for years.

Since 1993, **Bolofsky** figures, he has helped people beat more than 100,000 New York City parking tickets, preventing millions of dollars in fines from flowing to the city.

With a showman's ear for publicity and a few well-placed friends in the city's parking enforcement administration, the former accountant has built a career and a company out of studying and exploiting the minutiae of parking ticket regulations.

Bolofsky has published calendars and books on the subject. One was called "How to Beat a Parking Ticket." Another was "Secrets of the Parking Violations Bureau: Confessions of an Ex-Judge." He even organized a World Parking Ticket Competition, honoring people who had received hundreds of tickets.

But his most notable success has been a computer program he invented and markets through his Paramus-based company, Parking Survival Experts. The program - called ALARM, or Administrative Law and Response Manager - seeks to help owners of commercial-vehicle fleets take the pain out of fighting the hundreds, sometimes thousands, of New York parking tickets they accumulate each year.

By combining information from four databases, the program logs the details of a ticket, compares it with city parking regulations, and hunts down factual errors in the ticket. It then spits out a customized letter that can be mailed to the Parking Violations Bureau explaining why the ticket should be dismissed.

In October, **Bolofsky** began offering a similar service - the Internet-based parkingticket.com - for the general public.

The key to both is simple, he says: In the dense jungle of city parking

regulations, information is key - and most people don't know how easy it is to get a ticket dismissed.

"If you don't know better, you are going to pay the ticket," **Bolofsky** said. "[People] don't know that they can fight the ticket. They think they have to pay it or you get in trouble."

Moreover, he said, the battle does not mean going to City Hall. It can all be done by mail.

With parkingticket.com, the accused offender puts all the information from the ticket on the Web form and pays **Bolofsky** half the cost of the fine - a ticket usually costs \$55 - by credit card. A computer program then analyzes the ticket and returns instructions on how to fight it, along with a letter that outlines the errors in the ticket that can be sent to the city.

If the ticket is dismissed, parkingticket.com keeps the fee. If it is upheld, the fee is refunded, less \$1 for administration.

Certainly, with more than 100 different parking regulations, even city officials admit there is no shortage of reasons to have a ticket dismissed.

If the wrong make of the car is on the ticket, if the address of the alleged violation is not specific enough, if the agent's signature is missing - all are grounds for dismissing a ticket, according to a brochure issued by the New York City Parking Violations Bureau titled "Your Rights When Disputing a Parking Ticket."

That's because the ticket - as the prime document of evidence - must be credible, said Joel S. Peskoff, who wrote "How to Beat a Parking Ticket."

"The reason you can beat a ticket is that we don't live in a banana republic," Peskoff said. "There is still the presumption that anything the government does to you has to be proved."

Indeed, the city - outwardly at least - has no complaint about **Bolofsky's** efforts to help the victims of erroneously issued tickets.

Jim Moses, spokesman for the New York City Finance Department, which oversees the violations bureau, said the city has no problem with **Bolofsky's** service and, in fact, has a solid record of helping people fight tickets themselves.

"We're not looking to take money from people that should not have gotten a ticket in the first place," he said. The city received \$390 million in ticket revenue last year and issued 10 million tickets, of which one-third were dismissed and another one-third had the fine reduced.

But Moses questioned the need for **Bolofsky's** programs. He noted that the department's brochure already offers advice on how to battle tickets.

"There is no real reason to use a service like that because people can contact

the Department of Finance for free," Moses said. "It seems quite expensive."

Bolofsky, a bulky man with a tight shock of hair and a ready supply of jokes, stumbled into the parking violation industry in 1982. He was living at his parents' house in Queens and regularly fell afoul of alternate-side-of-the-street parking laws.

"I had to do the commuter shuffle every day," he said. "It wasn't so famous still and nobody knew what the rules were."

So he published a calendar that indicated when and where people could safely park on the street.

Along the way, he branched out into books, organized the World Parking Ticket Competition, and even created a gift card that mimicked a ticket and could be placed on the windshield to fool meter maids.

By the early 1990s, he designed ALARM.

Bolofsky said he has about 1,200 customers who pay a basic price of \$2,500 a year to lease the program. He declined to specify the company's annual revenue, but estimated it to be \$3 million. He has six full-time and six part-time employees.

Among his consultants and employees are a former parking violations judge, a former city police officer, and a former city supervisor of traffic agents. His clients, **Bolofsky** said, include media companies like NBC and CBS as well as those with sizeable fleets, such as Yellow Freight, Tuscan Dairy, and New England Motor Freight.

Bolofsky said his commercial customers should have a 75 percent success rate or they get their money back. Although the experience of two clients interviewed by The Record did not quite match **Bolofsky's** claim, both were pleased with the service.

"The man's system is excellent," said Dave Borngesser, director of safety for A-P-A Transport Corp. of North Bergen, which has used the program about 3 1/2 years.

Borngesser said that with about 25 to 35 trucks going into Manhattan daily, his company has received 869 summonses this year. Of those, it has challenged 214 and had 162 dismissed. Thirty-seven are pending, and it paid 15 tickets that were unsuccessfully challenged, he said.

Borngesser said **Bolofsky's** success rate is 75 percent of those that are challengeable. "You can't challenge every ticket. If they are correct, they are correct," he said.

At Anheuser Busch's distribution center in Queens, the program has saved the company from paying 2,600 tickets worth \$153,000 - or about 62 percent of the tickets received - in seven years, warehouse assistant Ray Ottinger said. It has paid 1,600 tickets, worth \$90,000, he said.

The company, which has about 150 trucks in the city, pays \$15,000 to lease the program annually, he said. Before, he said, Anheuser Busch just paid the tickets.

The success of parkingticket.com is uncertain. **Bolofsky** said it has had more than 20,000 hits and 500 people have paid for the service since late October. It's too early to say how many tickets will be dismissed, he said.

But one person who does not believe in **Bolofsky's** programs is rival Andrea Gerstle, owner of Ann Dee Ltd. in New York, which offers to represent companies with multiple tickets in Parking Violations Court. Gerstle said no computer could replace the human touch and diplomacy of an in-person campaign.

"I've got a number of their clients because they're not happy," Gerstle said, declining to say how much she charges. "A computer is only as good as what you put in the computer. When you're sitting face to face with a judge, you can discuss the pros and cons and maybe push a little more."

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