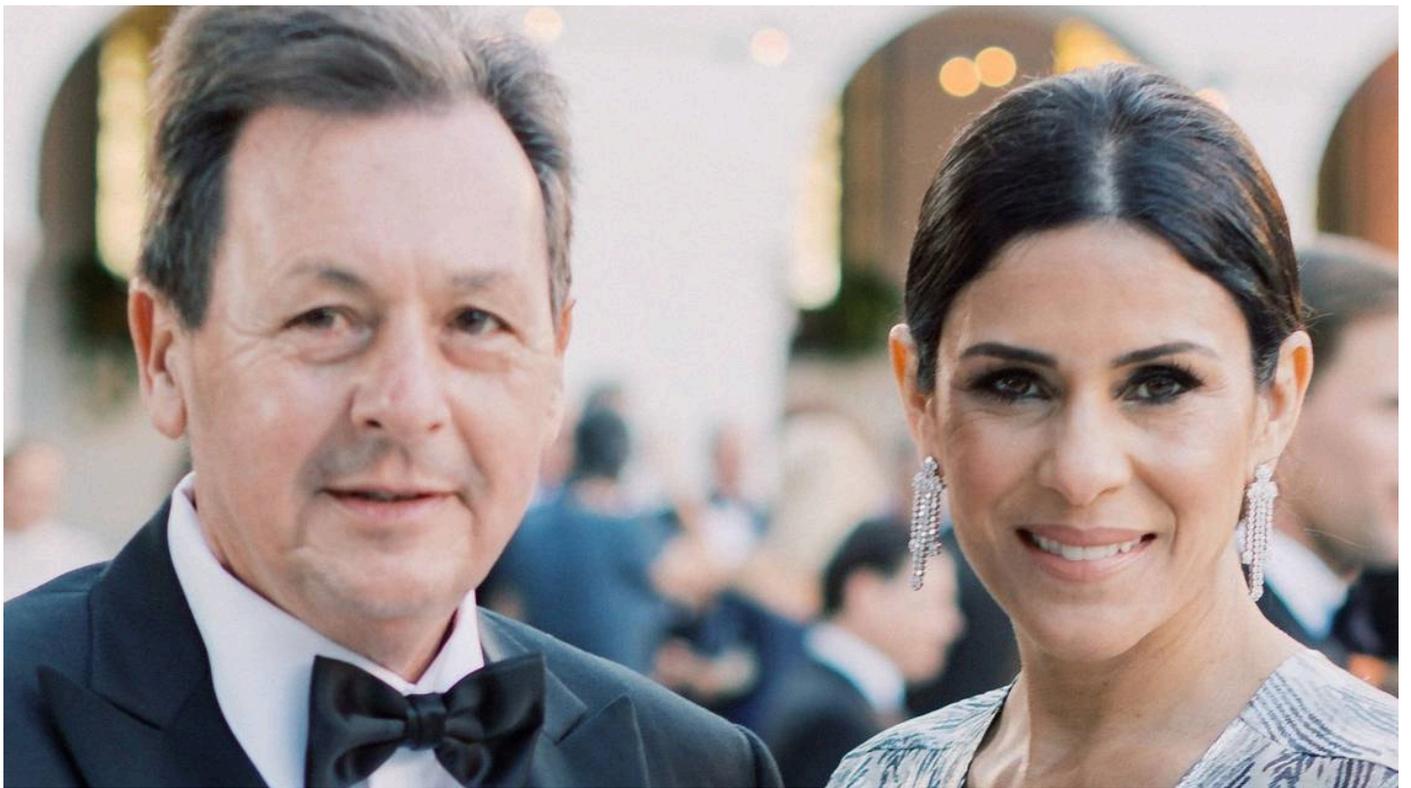


MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

# An elite Miami Friendsgiving ended in ambulance rides. Was Tatiana Pino's dish to blame?

BY DOUGLAS HANKS AND TESS RISKI

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Sergio Pino and Tatiana Pino in an undated photo, before their marriage dissolved into divorce proceedings. CORTESÍA/ELAINE PALLADINO

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## FBI investigating Sergio Pino

FBI agents raided the residence the well-known home builder as part of a investigation into his alleged connection to threats against his wife Tatiana Pino's life. The pair are in a divorce dispute.

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Several years before she [raised concerns that her husband was poisoning her](#), Tatiana Pino joined Florida's lieutenant governor and other high-powered members of her Miami prayer group for a potluck "Friendsgiving" dinner. The meal had barely started before guests started bolting to the bathroom from an apparent wave of food poisoning that multiple attendees later concluded started with the roasted Brussels sprouts that Pino brought to the party.

Guests were so sick that a squad of ambulances rushed more than a dozen women, including Pino, to the hospital from the annual backyard dinner held by Lisa Lorenzo, a close Pino friend and host of a Christian podcast.

"It was uncanny that we were dropping like flies," said Vicki Lopez, a party attendee who is now a Florida state representative. "At least 10 of us got sick. And it was immediate."

The ill-fated dinner party is raising new alarm bells among Pino's inner circle after last week's news that [she had accused her estranged husband](#), prominent developer Sergio Pino, of poisoning her while they were living together. He has denied the allegation.

**[READ MORE: FBI investigating developer Sergio Pino's possible link to threats against wife's life](#)**

The Miami Herald spoke with four people who were at Lorenzo's home on the night of the Friendsgiving potluck in 2019, plus a spokesperson for U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio, who arrived later in the evening to check on his ill wife. Authorities never identified the source of the wave of illness that hit Lorenzo's guests at that November gathering, but attendees said they concluded at the time it was likely Pino's Brussels sprouts based on who had the biggest helpings.

"The people who got the sickest ate the most," one attendee said.

Lorenzo's party also captures how [the Pino saga](#) is reverberating through some of the highest levels of local and state politics.

Among the attendees of the Nov. 22, 2019, dinner were Alina Garcia, now [a Republican state representative](#) who is running for elections supervisor in Miami-Dade, and Viviana Bovo, wife of Hialeah Mayor Esteban Bovo. Florida Lt. Gov. Jeanette Nuñez had left early, so she wasn't on the scene as multiple guests succumbed to nausea, diarrhea and confusion, according to accounts relayed by attendees. But Nuñez went home with a plate of food from the buffet, prompting at least one guest to send a message warning her against eating anything from that night's event, attendees said.

After the wave of illness spread through the all-woman gathering, Rubio arrived at Lorenzo's house to check on both his wife, Jeanette Rubio, and an employee of his Senate office who is also friends with Lorenzo.

A Rubio spokesperson on Monday confirmed the senator's arrival at Lorenzo's party.

"Senator Rubio went to pick his wife up from a women's Bible study dinner after she called saying she was feeling ill. Fortunately, she did not require medical attention," the spokesperson said.

Also on the scene at Lorenzo's party following her guests getting ill was Sergio Pino, whom Tatiana Pino [would later accuse of poisoning her](#) in a deposition after she filed for divorce in April 2022.

Last fall, Sergio Pino acknowledged the health scare at Lorenzo's house when he gave his own deposition in the divorce proceedings.

He testified that "a bunch of people" were hospitalized from what he understood to be food poisoning at a dinner party. Though he was not attending the party, he said he was called to the house when guests began getting sick, according to the

deposition. He then visited the hospital where his wife was, staying for about two to three hours. Sergio said he recalls Tatiana staying at the hospital overnight.

A video taken that night and shared with the Herald showed the street outside the 7,000-square-foot house Lorenzo owns with her husband surrounded by at least six ambulances, with lights flashing.

The incident prompted a state police investigation by the head of Nuñez's security at the time, Florida Highway Patrol trooper Joe Sanchez. Sanchez, now a Republican candidate for Miami-Dade sheriff, said Monday that he collected samples of the night's food offerings, including the Brussels sprouts, and sent them to a state facility for analysis.

"We did an investigation. We sent it to the crime lab," Sanchez said. "It came back negative" for anything that would explain why people got sick.

Sanchez said he did not have details about the results, and an investigative report was not immediately available from the Florida Highway Patrol.

He also said that after people got sick that evening, there was no immediate reason to suspect Pino's Brussels sprouts. "If I'm not mistaken, some people ate the Brussels sprouts and didn't get sick," he said.

There was no immediate comment from the press office of Gov. Ron DeSantis, which handles media inquiries for Nuñez.

The 2019 party offers a window into the life of Tatiana Pino in the final years of her marriage to one of Miami's most prominent developers. In her 2023 deposition, Pino called Lorenzo her best friend, saying that Lorenzo had accompanied her the year prior to a Baltimore hospital where doctors revealed that Tatiana Pino had fentanyl in her system — a substance she said she had not ingested.

In a May 15 episode of [Lorenzo's podcast](#), Faith with Friends, Tatiana Pino credited prayer with helping her navigate the end of a troubled relationship.

“I’ve gone through not only relationship suffering, I’ve gone through physically suffering,” she said. “But Jesus was there.”

Federal agents last week searched Sergio Pino’s home and the offices of his development company, both in Coral Gables. The Herald [reported](#) that both searches were part of an FBI investigation into Pino’s possible link to threats made against his wife.

Over the past two years, Pino and his wife have been battling each other in a divorce case that is headed for trial in July, according to Miami-Dade Circuit Court records. FBI agents [are investigating](#) whether Sergio Pino recruited a part-time worker at his home to hire three men to threaten his wife’s life in the wake of her filing for divorce in April 2022, people familiar with the FBI probe told the Herald. The part-time employee and the three men have been charged in Miami federal court with targeting Tatiana Pino in a hit-and-run at her Pinecrest home and targeting her sister via arson attacks on three of her vehicles.

It’s not known if the Friendsgiving gathering has been looked at by investigators [on the current Pino case](#). Lorenzo said she could not speak with the Herald because “I’ve been asked by authorities not to comment.”

## **BRUSSELS SPROUTS TO BLAME?**

Attendees of Lorenzo’s 2019 dinner party described a gathering of more than three dozen women that began with prayer and guests expressing what they were thankful for that year. After the food was served in a dining area set up in Lorenzo’s spacious backyard outside of South Miami, multiple guests began succumbing to an illness that was startling in how quickly it hit. Their calls to 911 brought more than a dozen ambulances to the home, attendees said.

Attendees who spoke to the Herald said medical authorities were unable to definitively say what made people sick. By comparing notes about who ate what, members of the group later concluded Pino’s Brussels sprouts were the likely culprit, based on what happened to the women who had the largest helpings of the vegetable dish.

In his 2023 deposition, Sergio Pino said the dinner party guests included people from Tatiana's church group. He said "everybody brought something" to the gathering and that he was not aware of whose dish was suspected of causing the illness.

"So do you understand that they suspected the dish my client brought?" Tatiana's attorney, Raymond Rafool, asked.

"I have no reason to think that," Sergio Pino responded.

Poisoning allegations come up repeatedly in depositions from both Sergio and Tatiana, who testified that in 2022, after years of unexplained illness, doctors detected fentanyl in her system.

Tatiana said in her deposition that she believed her husband was poisoning her, and that, once she moved out of the house she shared with him, her symptoms disappeared.

While Sergio Pino acknowledged in his November deposition that Tatiana has "been sick for a long time," he outright denied that he ever poisoned his wife. "I don't do those things," he said.

"And who do you think was poisoning my client when she was living at your house?" Rafool asked.

"Nobody was poisoning Tatiana when she was living at my house," Sergio said.

Sergio Pino's attorney Deanna Shifrin denied the poisoning allegations, pointing to comments Tatiana made in a December 2023 deposition stating that no healthcare provider had concluded she had been poisoned.

Lopez, [a Republican member of the Florida House since 2022](#), got sick at the 2019 party and said she was contacted by a state investigator after the event who wanted to know about the food and drinks served there. In an interview Monday, Lopez said she was stunned at how quickly the illness swept through the group.

“I sat down at the table, and I may have taken two or three bites,” she said. “I started to feel dizzy. The next thing I knew I was running to the bathroom to throw up.”

Lopez said she shared an ambulance ride to the South Miami Hospital with Tatiana Pino, whom she described as even more ill than her. Doctors gave Lopez anti-nausea medicine and allowed her to leave around 3 a.m. She took an Uber home.

Initially, Lopez said her group of friends did not know which food got them sick. In the days that followed, though, they zeroed in on the Brussels sprouts based on what the people who got ill had eaten, including Lopez, who sampled Pino's vegetable dish.

“I have had pretty severe food poisoning before,” she said. “I have never gotten sick so quickly.”

*Miami Herald staff writer Jay Weaver contributed to this report.*

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