



Department of Justice

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Northern District of Georgia

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ATLANTA AREA LAWYER SENTENCED TO OVER 10 YEARS IN PRISON FOR OPERATING A \$40 MILLION "PONZI" INVESTMENT SCHEME

Atlanta, GA - ROBERT P. COPELAND, 47, of Marietta, Georgia, was sentenced today by United States District Judge Beverly B. Martin to serve over 10 years in federal prison on a charge of wire fraud, relating to a \$40 million investment fraud scheme.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said, "Many victims lost their life savings and retirements as a result of this massive and long-running scam, perpetrated by a lawyer who purposefully solicited retirees. He will now receive the retribution and punishment that this devastating crime requires."

COPELAND was sentenced to 10 years, one month in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution of approximately \$16.7 million. The United States has also seized or frozen numerous assets relating to COPELAND's scheme, including 12 real estate properties, bank accounts, artwork, jewelry, automobiles, and stock certificates. COPELAND pleaded guilty to the charge on April 9, 2009.

According to United States Attorney Nahmias and other information presented in court: COPELAND, a Marietta-based real estate and elder law attorney, operated a fraudulent investment scam, commonly known as a "Ponzi" scheme, from at least 2004 through early 2009. He solicited individuals directly, through seminars he participated in, and through financial planners to whom he paid commissions in exchange for referrals of investment clients. COPELAND falsely represented that he would use an investor's money in lucrative real estate financing and/or development activities, such as by funding a mortgage or bridge loan to a real estate purchaser who needed financing.

Typically, COPELAND would promise returns as high as 15% every 6 to 12 months, and would furnish the investor a note and security deed that would purport to document the investor's secured interest in a particular piece of real estate. Based on these representations, COPELAND raised more than \$40 million since 2004 from hundreds of investors nationwide. Some of these investments constituted retirement funds.

COPELAND's investment business was a scam. He was engaged in little if any real estate financing, development, or other profit-making activities with investor funds. The notes and security deeds he furnished investors were in almost all cases bogus. Instead of using investor funds in the ways he had represented, he operated a so-called "Ponzi" scheme. In other words, COPELAND used new investments to pay earlier investors the distributions that he had promised. When the time came to pay the new investors, he would have to solicit and take in yet more investments. This created an unsustainable and ever-expanding mountain of debt. When the scheme collapsed in early 2009, COPELAND was left owing over \$28 million to over 125 victims.

The case remains under investigation.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the FBI. The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission is pursuing a related civil enforcement action.

Assistant United States Attorneys Justin S. Anand and Gerald S. Sachs are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.