UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
TAMPA DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v. CASE NO. 8:12-CR-359-T-35TGW

JOHN HENLEY FOWLER
a/k/a John H. Fowler, Sr.

PLEA AGREEMENT

Pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c), the United States of America, by Robert E. O'Neill, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, and the defendant, John Henley Fowler, a/k/a John H. Fowler, Sr., and the attorney for the defendant, Mark D. Ringsmuth, mutually agree as follows:

A. **Particularized Terms**

1. Count Pleading To

The defendant shall enter a plea of guilty to Count One of the Information. Count One charges the defendant with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and mail fraud, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1349.

2. Maximum Penalties

Count One carries a maximum sentence of 20 years of imprisonment, a fine of not more than $250,000 or twice the gross gain caused by the offense, or twice the gross loss caused by the offense, whichever is greater, a term of supervised release of three years, and a special assessment of $100, said special assessment to be due on the date of sentencing. With respect to certain offenses, the Court shall

order the defendant to make restitution to any victim of the offense(s), and with respect to other offenses, the Court may order the defendant to make restitution to any victim of the offense(s), or to the community, as set forth below.

3. Elements of the Offense

The defendant acknowledges understanding the nature and elements of the offense with which defendant has been charged and to which defendant is pleading guilty. The elements of Count One are:

First: two or more persons, in some way or manner, agreed to try to accomplish a common and unlawful plan to commit wire fraud or mail fraud, as charged in the Information; and

Second: the Defendant knew the unlawful purpose of the plan and willfully joined in it.

4. No Further Charges

If the Court accepts this plea agreement, the United States Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida agrees not to charge defendant with committing any other federal criminal offenses known to the United States Attorney's Office at the time of the execution of this agreement, related to the conduct giving rise to this plea agreement.

5. Mandatory Restitution to Victims of Offense of Conviction

Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. §§ 3663A(a) and (b), defendant agrees to make full restitution to the victims as determined by the Court.

6. Guidelines Sentence

Pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. 11(c)(1)(B), the United States will recommend to the Court that the defendant be sentenced within the defendant's

applicable guidelines range as determined by the Court pursuant to the United States Sentencing Guidelines, as adjusted by any departure the United States has agreed to recommend in this plea agreement. The parties understand that such a recommendation is not binding on the Court and that, if it is not accepted by this Court, neither the United States nor the defendant will be allowed to withdraw from the plea agreement, and the defendant will not be allowed to withdraw from the plea of guilty.

7. Acceptance of Responsibility - Three Levels

At the time of sentencing, and in the event that no adverse information is received suggesting such a recommendation to be unwarranted, the United States will recommend to the Court that the defendant receive a two-level downward adjustment for acceptance of responsibility, pursuant to USSG §3E1.1(a). The defendant understands that this recommendation or request is not binding on the Court, and if not accepted by the Court, the defendant will not be allowed to withdraw from the plea.

Further, at the time of sentencing, if the defendant's offense level prior to operation of subsection (a) is level 16 or greater, and if the defendant complies with the provisions of USSG §3E1.1(b), the United States agrees to file a motion pursuant to USSG §3E1.1(b) for a downward adjustment of one additional level. The defendant understands that the determination as to whether the defendant has qualified for a downward adjustment of a third level for acceptance of responsibility rests solely with the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, and the defendant agrees that the defendant cannot and will not challenge that determination, whether by appeal, collateral attack, or otherwise.

8. Cooperation - Substantial Assistance to be Considered

Defendant agrees to cooperate fully with the United States in the investigation and prosecution of other persons, and to testify, subject to a prosecution for perjury or making a false statement, fully and truthfully before any federal court proceeding or federal grand jury in connection with the charges in this case and other matters, such cooperation to further include a full and complete disclosure of all relevant information, including production of any and all books, papers, documents, and other objects in defendant's possession or control, and to be reasonably available for interviews which the United States may require. If the cooperation is completed prior to sentencing, the government agrees to consider whether such cooperation qualifies as "substantial assistance" in accordance with the policy of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, warranting the filing of a motion at the time of sentencing recommending (1) a downward departure from the applicable guideline range pursuant to USSG §5K1.1, or (2) the imposition of a sentence below a statutory minimum, if any, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3553(e), or (3) both. If the cooperation is completed subsequent to sentencing, the government agrees to consider whether such cooperation qualifies as "substantial assistance" in accordance with the policy of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida, warranting the filing of a motion for a reduction of sentence within one year of the imposition of sentence pursuant to Fed. R. Crim. P. 35(b). In any case, the defendant understands that the determination as to whether "substantial assistance" has been provided or what type of motion related thereto will be filed, if any, rests solely with the United States Attorney for the Middle

District of Florida, and the defendant agrees that defendant cannot and will not challenge that determination, whether by appeal, collateral attack, or otherwise.

9. Use of Information - Section 1B1.8

Pursuant to USSG §1B1.8(a), the United States agrees that no self-incriminating information which the defendant may provide during the course of defendant's cooperation and pursuant to this agreement shall be used in determining the applicable sentencing guideline range, subject to the restrictions and limitations set forth in USSG §1B1.8(b).

10. Cooperation - Responsibilities of Parties

a. The government will make known to the Court and other relevant authorities the nature and extent of defendant's cooperation and any other mitigating circumstances indicative of the defendant's rehabilitative intent by assuming the fundamental civic duty of reporting crime. However, the defendant understands that the government can make no representation that the Court will impose a lesser sentence solely on account of, or in consideration of, such cooperation.

b. It is understood that should the defendant knowingly provide incomplete or untruthful testimony, statements, or information pursuant to this agreement, or should the defendant falsely implicate or incriminate any person, or should the defendant fail to voluntarily and unreservedly disclose and provide full, complete, truthful, and honest knowledge, information, and cooperation regarding any of the matters noted herein, the following conditions shall apply:

(1) The defendant may be prosecuted for any perjury or false declarations, if any, committed while testifying pursuant to this agreement, or for obstruction of justice.

(2) The United States may prosecute the defendant for the charges which are to be dismissed pursuant to this agreement, if any, and may either seek reinstatement of or refile such charges and prosecute the defendant thereon in the event such charges have been dismissed pursuant to this agreement. With regard to such charges, if any, which have been dismissed, the defendant, being fully aware of the nature of all such charges now pending in the instant case, and being further aware of defendant's rights, as to all felony charges pending in such cases (those offenses punishable by imprisonment for a term of over one year), to not be held to answer to said felony charges unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, and further being aware that all such felony charges in the instant case have heretofore properly been returned by the indictment of a grand jury, does hereby agree to reinstatement of such charges by recision of any order dismissing them or, alternatively, does hereby waive, in open court, prosecution by indictment and consents that the United States may proceed by information instead of by indictment with regard to any felony charges which may be dismissed in the instant case, pursuant to this plea agreement, and the defendant further agrees to waive the statute of limitations and any speedy trial claims on such charges.

(3) The United States may prosecute the defendant for any offenses set forth herein, if any, the prosecution of which in accordance with this

agreement, the United States agrees to forego, and the defendant agrees to waive the statute of limitations and any speedy trial claims as to any such offenses.

(4) The government may use against the defendant the defendant's own admissions and statements and the information and books, papers, documents, and objects that the defendant has furnished in the course of the defendant's cooperation with the government.

(5) The defendant will not be permitted to withdraw the guilty pleas to those counts to which defendant hereby agrees to plead in the instant case but, in that event, defendant will be entitled to the sentencing limitations, if any, set forth in this plea agreement, with regard to those counts to which the defendant has pled; or in the alternative, at the option of the United States, the United States may move the Court to declare this entire plea agreement null and void.

11. Forfeiture of Assets

The defendant agrees to forfeit to the United States immediately and voluntarily any and all assets and property, or portions thereof, subject to forfeiture, pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C) and 28 U.S.C. § 2461(c), whether in the possession or control of the United States or in the possession or control of the defendant or defendant's nominees. The assets to be forfeited specifically include, but are not limited to, a money judgment in the amount of the proceeds obtained as a result of the conspiracy charged in Count One, the exact amount of which shall be determined at or before sentencing.

The defendant also hereby agrees to waive all constitutional, statutory and procedural challenges in any manner (including direct appeal, habeas corpus, or any other means) to any forfeiture carried out in accordance with this Plea Agreement on any grounds, including that the forfeiture described herein constitutes an excessive fine, was not properly noticed in the charging instrument, addressed by the Court at the time of the guilty plea, announced at sentencing, or incorporated into the judgment. Specifically, the defendant agrees that the civil forfeiture action referenced in the previous paragraph was properly filed and noticed and that the assets were properly forfeited to the United States.

The defendant further consents to the civil forfeiture, judicial or administrative, of the following assets: (1) all of the financial accounts, vehicles, funds held in escrow, and real property forfeited to the United States in *United States v. Assets Identified in Paragraph 1 of the Verified Complaint*, Case No. 8:12-cv-00333-T-17TBM; (2) the contents of Well Fargo Bank Account Number 2000058148365, seized pursuant to a seizure warrant on November 29, 2011; and (3) the contents of JP Morgan Chase Bank Account Number 952857241, seized pursuant to a seizure warrant on November 29, 2011. The defendant agrees that he elected not to contest the forfeiture of any of the defendant assets in the civil case, and waives any right he has to challenge the forfeiture judgment. The defendant further agrees to waive his right to contest the administrative forfeiture of the contents of the two bank accounts specified above (seized on November 29, 2011), and waives any right he has to challenge the declarations of forfeiture.

The defendant admits and agrees that the conduct described in the Factual Basis below provides a sufficient factual and statutory basis for the forfeiture of the property sought by the government. Pursuant to the provisions of Rule 32.2(b)(1)(A), the United States and the defendant request that at or before sentencing, the Court make a determination that the government has established the amount of the proceeds of the conspiracy to which defendant is pleading guilty and enter an order of forfeiture. Pursuant to Rule 32.2(b)(4), the defendant agrees that the preliminary order of forfeiture will satisfy the notice requirement and will be final as to the defendant at the time it is entered. In the event the forfeiture is omitted from the judgment, the defendant agrees that the forfeiture order may be incorporated into the written judgment at any time pursuant to Rule 36.

The defendant agrees that the United States shall, at its option, be entitled to the forfeiture of any property (substitute assets) of the defendant up to the value of the money judgment. The Court shall retain jurisdiction to settle any disputes arising from application of this clause. The defendant agrees that forfeiture of substitute assets as authorized herein shall not be deemed an alteration of the defendant's sentence.

The defendant agrees to take all steps necessary to identify and locate all substitute assets and to transfer custody of such assets to the United States before the defendant's sentencing. To that end, the defendant agrees to make a full and complete disclosure of all assets over which defendant exercises control directly or indirectly, including all assets held by nominees, to execute any documents requested by the United States to obtain from any other parties by lawful means any records of assets

owned by the defendant, and to consent to the release of the defendant's tax returns for the previous five years. The defendant agrees to be interviewed by the government, prior to and after sentencing, regarding such assets. The defendant further agrees to be polygraphed on the issue of assets, if it is deemed necessary by the United States. The defendant agrees that Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 11 and U.S.S.G. § 1B1.8 will not protect from forfeiture assets disclosed by the defendant as part of his cooperation.

The defendant agrees to take all steps necessary to assist the government in obtaining clear title to any substitute assets before the defendant's sentencing. In addition to providing full and complete information about substitute assets, these steps include, but are not limited to, the surrender of title, the signing of a consent decree of forfeiture, and signing of any other documents necessary to effectuate such transfers.

Forfeiture of the defendant's assets shall not be treated as satisfaction of any fine, restitution, cost of imprisonment, or any other penalty the Court may impose upon the defendant in addition to forfeiture.

B. <u>Standard Terms and Conditions</u>

1. <u>Restitution, Special Assessment and Fine</u>

The defendant understands and agrees that the Court, in addition to or in lieu of any other penalty, <u>shall</u> order the defendant to make restitution to any victim of the offense(s), pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3663A, for all offenses described in 18 U.S.C. § 3663A(c)(1) (limited to offenses committed on or after April 24, 1996); and the Court may order the defendant to make restitution to any victim of the offense(s), pursuant to

18 U.S.C. § 3663 (limited to offenses committed on or after November 1, 1987), including restitution as to all counts charged, whether or not the defendant enters a plea of guilty to such counts, and whether or not such counts are dismissed pursuant to this agreement. On each count to which a plea of guilty is entered, the Court shall impose a special assessment, to be payable to the Clerk's Office, United States District Court, and due on date of sentencing. The defendant understands that this agreement imposes no limitation as to fine.

2. Supervised Release

The defendant understands that the offense(s) to which the defendant is pleading provide(s) for imposition of a term of supervised release upon release from imprisonment, and that, if the defendant should violate the conditions of release, the defendant would be subject to a further term of imprisonment.

3. Sentencing Information

The United States reserves its right and obligation to report to the Court and the United States Probation Office all information concerning the background, character, and conduct of the defendant, to provide relevant factual information, including the totality of the defendant's criminal activities, if any, not limited to the count(s) to which defendant pleads, to respond to comments made by the defendant or defendant's counsel, and to correct any misstatements or inaccuracies. The United States further reserves its right to make any recommendations it deems appropriate regarding the disposition of this case, subject to any limitations set forth herein, if any.

Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3664(d)(3) and Fed. R. Crim. P. 32(d)(2)(A)(ii), the defendant agrees to complete and submit, upon execution of this plea agreement,

an affidavit reflecting the defendant's financial condition. The defendant further agrees, and by the execution of this plea agreement, authorizes the United States Attorney's Office to provide to, and obtain from, the United States Probation Office, the financial affidavit, any of the defendant's federal, state, and local tax returns, bank records and any other financial information concerning the defendant, for the purpose of making any recommendations to the Court and for collecting any assessments, fines, restitution, or forfeiture ordered by the Court.

4. Sentencing Recommendations

It is understood by the parties that the Court is neither a party to nor bound by this agreement. The Court may accept or reject the agreement, or defer a decision until it has had an opportunity to consider the presentence report prepared by the United States Probation Office. The defendant understands and acknowledges that, although the parties are permitted to make recommendations and present arguments to the Court, the sentence will be determined solely by the Court, with the assistance of the United States Probation Office. Defendant further understands and acknowledges that any discussions between defendant or defendant's attorney and the attorney or other agents for the government regarding any recommendations by the government are not binding on the Court and that, should any recommendations be rejected, defendant will not be permitted to withdraw defendant's plea pursuant to this plea agreement. The government expressly reserves the right to support and defend any decision that the Court may make with regard to the defendant's sentence, whether or not such decision is consistent with the government's recommendations contained herein.

5. Defendant's Waiver of Right to Appeal and Right to Collaterally Challenge the Sentence

The defendant agrees that this Court has jurisdiction and authority to impose any sentence up to the statutory maximum and expressly waives the right to appeal defendant's sentence or to challenge it collaterally on any ground, including the ground that the Court erred in determining the applicable guidelines range pursuant to the United States Sentencing Guidelines, except (a) the ground that the sentence exceeds the defendant's applicable guidelines range as determined by the Court pursuant to the United States Sentencing Guidelines; (b) the ground that the sentence exceeds the statutory maximum penalty; or (c) the ground that the sentence violates the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution; provided, however, that if the government exercises its right to appeal the sentence imposed, as authorized by 18 U.S.C. § 3742(b), then the defendant is released from his waiver and may appeal the sentence as authorized by 18 U.S.C. § 3742(a).

6. Middle District of Florida Agreement

It is further understood that this agreement is limited to the Office of the United States Attorney for the Middle District of Florida and cannot bind other federal, state, or local prosecuting authorities, although this office will bring defendant's cooperation, if any, to the attention of other prosecuting officers or others, if requested.

7. Filing of Agreement

This agreement shall be presented to the Court, in open court or in camera, in whole or in part, upon a showing of good cause, and filed in this cause, at the time of defendant's entry of a plea of guilty pursuant hereto.

8. Voluntariness

The defendant acknowledges that defendant is entering into this agreement and is pleading guilty freely and voluntarily without reliance upon any discussions between the attorney for the government and the defendant and defendant's attorney and without promise of benefit of any kind (other than the concessions contained herein), and without threats, force, intimidation, or coercion of any kind. The defendant further acknowledges defendant's understanding of the nature of the offense or offenses to which defendant is pleading guilty and the elements thereof, including the penalties provided by law, and defendant's complete satisfaction with the representation and advice received from defendant's undersigned counsel (if any). The defendant also understands that defendant has the right to plead not guilty or to persist in that plea if it has already been made, and that defendant has the right to be tried by a jury with the assistance of counsel, the right to confront and cross-examine the witnesses against defendant, the right against compulsory self-incrimination, and the right to compulsory process for the attendance of witnesses to testify in defendant's defense; but, by pleading guilty, defendant waives or gives up those rights and there will be no trial. The defendant further understands that if defendant pleads guilty, the Court may ask defendant questions about the offense or offenses to which defendant pleaded, and if defendant answers those questions under oath, on the record, and in the presence of counsel (if any), defendant's answers may later be used against defendant in a prosecution for perjury or false statement. The defendant also understands that defendant will be adjudicated guilty of the offenses to which defendant has pleaded and, if any of such offenses are felonies, may thereby be deprived of

certain rights, such as the right to vote, to hold public office, to serve on a jury, or to have possession of firearms.

9. Factual Basis

Defendant is pleading guilty because defendant is in fact guilty. The defendant certifies that defendant does hereby admit that the facts that relate to him set forth below are true, and were this case to go to trial, the United States would be able to prove those specific facts and others beyond a reasonable doubt:

FACTS

Beginning in or about December 2010, conspirators developed a plan to use false and fraudulent representations, pretenses and promises to solicit victim-investors to wire funds into bank accounts they controlled for investment in a purported gold futures investment program supposedly run by an existing New York-based investment firm called Paulson & Co., Inc. The defendant became aware of the unlawful purpose of the plan, willfully joined in it, and actively participated in it through and including November 29, 2011.

The defendant, who was residing in Lee County, Florida, served as trustee of a Florida corporation created in 2011, that is, PAULSON & CO., INC. [hereinafter "PAULSON-FL"]. The defendant caused the incorporation of PAULSON-FL, leased office space for the corporation in Ft. Myers, Florida, and opened bank accounts in the name of the corporation, all for the purpose of making PAULSON-FL appear to be legitimate. The defendant and co-conspirators fraudulently represented that PAULSON-FL was a branch office of the real Paulson & Co., Inc.

The PAULSON-FL bank accounts were opened at Bank of America, Wells Fargo Bank, and JPMorgan Chase in Ft. Myers, Florida. The bank accounts were used to receive wire and inter-bank transfers of funds from victim-investors who wanted to invest in the purported gold futures investment program. The defendant and co-conspirators used said funds to perpetuate the fraud scheme and otherwise for the personal enrichment of themselves, their family members, and friends.

CK & K was an unincorporated Florida entity, with its principal place of business in Tampa, Florida, controlled by co-conspirators. In late January 2011, the defendant used his own funds to purchase a cashier's check in the amount of $10,000 for the purpose of opening a bank account in the name of CK & K to be used to receive victim-investors' funds. The CK & K account was opened at Wachovia Bank, n/k/a Wells Fargo Bank, in Tampa, Florida. During the same time frame, co-conspirators began to conduct three-way conference calls with prospective victim-investors to solicit them to invest in the purported gold futures investment program. When they convinced a victim-investor to participate in the purported gold futures investment program, the conspirators directed the victim-investor to transmit his or her funds, via wire and other means, to the CK & K account.

In an effort to enhance the appearance of the fraudulent investment program, a co-conspirator created false and fraudulent documents, including promissory notes and assignments of collateral, which supposedly evidenced and guaranteed, respectively, the victim-investors' participation in the purported gold futures investment program. In preparing these documents, the co-conspirator used the names of various existing foreign and/or domestic entities as well as forged signatures of officials of same,

without such entities' and individuals' knowledge or consent. The promissory notes also guaranteed a rate of return, usually ranging between three and six percent, each month. After a victim-investor wired his or her investment funds, co-conspirators caused a false and fraudulent promissory note and assignment of collateral to be sent, via FedEx, from either Tampa or Ft. Myers to the victim-investor who, in most cases, lived outside the state of Florida.

As the fraudulent investment program grew, conspirators organized and hosted live presentations conducted via conference call to solicit more prospective victim-investors to participate in the purported gold futures investment program. Some of the presentations were recorded for later access by other prospects. At times, at least one of the co-conspirators falsely posed as a satisfied investor and gave a testimonial touting the success of the fraudulent investment program. The conspirators also developed and used a website, known at different times as "gold4gain.com" and "justwallstreetguys.com", to promote the fraudulent investment program.

Although he typically did not solicit prospects directly, in or about November 2011, the defendant spoke with a prospective victim-investor via telephone. During this conversation, the defendant portrayed himself as a close personal friend and professional associate of the founder of the existing New York-based investment firm of Paulson & Co., Inc., for the purpose of persuading the prospective victim-investor to wire his investment funds and participate in the purported gold futures investment program.

The defendant and co-conspirators utilized, and cause the utilization of, funds invested by later victim-investors to make interest payments to earlier victim-investors in

order to make it appear that the purported gold futures investment program was performing as represented, as in a typical Ponzi scheme. Other such funds were used to pay expenses associated with operating the fraud scheme, including, but not limited to, office rents, wire transfer fees, and FedEx fees. The bulk of the victim-investors' funds were diverted for the defendant's and the co-conspirators' own personal enrichment. They transferred and caused the transfer of said funds to accounts controlled by them and/or family members or friends, and they used victim-investors' funds to purchase motor vehicles, real property, home furnishings, jewelry, and other goods and services.

On or about October 31, 2011, in furtherance of the conspiracy, the defendant caused victim-investor Henry DuPont, for victim-investor Dora Lea DuPont, to transmit, via wire, from BancFirst in Oklahoma to the account in the name of PAULSON-FL at Bank of America in Ft. Myers, Florida, $1 million for investment in the purported gold futures investment program.

10. Entire Agreement

This plea agreement constitutes the entire agreement between the government and the defendant with respect to the aforementioned guilty plea and no other promises, agreements, or representations exist or have been made to the defendant or defendant's attorney with regard to such guilty plea.

11. Certification

The defendant and defendant's counsel certify that this plea agreement has been read in its entirety by (or has been read to) the defendant and that defendant fully understands its terms.

DATED this 23 day of August, 2012.

ROBERT E. O'NEILL
United States Attorney

By: Rachelle Desvaux Bedke

JOHN HENLEY FOWLER
Defendant

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