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NEWS

Mark Dente pleads the Fifth during trial over alleged Ponzi scheme

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Key Points

Former Copley coach Mark Dente is accused of operating a Ponzi scheme that bilked investors out of about \$200 million.

Dente invoked his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination during a trial about how much he profited from the scheme.

Dente left the trial, which proceeded without him. A financial expert says Dente received nearly \$4.8 million in the scheme.

Former Copley coach Mark Dente, who is accused of bilking investors out of \$200 million, took the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination during a trial to determine how much he personally profited from his alleged Ponzi scheme.

Dente, who appeared in Summit County Common Pleas Court without an attorney on Jan. 6, then left the courtroom while the trial proceeded without him.

He declined to answer questions from the Beacon Journal.

“I don’t think I’m allowed to say anything,” Dente told a Beacon Journal reporter outside of the courtroom.

The trial was part of a larger civil suit filed against Dente and his family members that focused on bank transfers they are accused of receiving from AEM Services, Dente’s real estate company.

David Linscott, a forensic accounting expert, testified that Dente received nearly \$4.8 million from AEM.

Dente, who was the boys' and girls' basketball coach at Copley High School, lost his coaching position in May 2022 as lawsuits piled up against him by investors with his Fairlawn business who claimed they hadn't been paid what they were owed.

Federal and state authorities are still investigating Dente for possible criminal charges.

Mark Dottore, a receiver from Cleveland, was appointed by the court to try to recoup as much money lost by investors as possible. He filed more than 300 clawback lawsuits against Dente investors whom he claimed were "net winners."

The first clawback lawsuit was scheduled for trial Jan. 5, but it settled at the last minute. The suit, filed against SDR Realty in Green, sought about \$18.4 million. The terms of the settlement haven't been disclosed.

Many of the clawback suits have been settled, but more than 150 are still pending.

Dottore also has filed several lawsuits against those accused of colluding with Dente, as well as the suit against Dente and his family.

Jonathan Hein, a visiting judge who retired from the Darke County bench, is presiding over all the Dente lawsuits. Hein has ruled in several clawback lawsuits that Dente operated a Ponzi scheme.

Lawsuit claims Dente family used business funds for personal expenses

The lawsuit against Dente and his family was filed in January 2023.

The suit names Dente, his wife, Sharon, his son, Anthony, and nephew as defendants.

The suit claims Dente and his family members used money from AEM to pay for personal expenses, including college tuition, home renovations, the purchase of a boat and vacation home, and mortgage payments on their Copley home, which recently was sold in a foreclosure proceeding. Dottore is seeking to recoup money from the home sale.

Michael Creveling, a Fairlawn attorney, represented Dente in the civil lawsuit until he withdrew in December 2023. In an answer he filed on behalf of Dente, he denied that his client acted “maliciously, fraudulently or intentionally as to any allegations.” He said Dente did “through poor business practices and accounting” co-mingle personal and business funds.

Sharon Dente said in an affidavit in the family lawsuit that she is married to Mark Dente but is a mother homemaker and never worked for AEM. She denied any knowledge of the business or how it functioned.

“Prior to the initiations of the lawsuits, I had never heard of a Ponzi scheme,” she said.

“I did not ask, and my husband did not tell me, any information regarding AEM Services or how our household bills were paid,” she added.

Anthony Dente said in an affidavit that he is a licensed Realtor and worked for AEM, where he assisted project managers and oversaw home renovations.

“At no time during my employment or while working as a realtor did I suspect any wrongdoing by AEM,” he said.

Anthony said he invested \$625,250 with AEM, which he said was more than he got back. He said this makes him a “net loser.”

Attorneys for Dottore said they reached settlements with Sharon and Anthony Dente, though the terms haven’t yet been disclosed.

Ed Muse, a Fairlawn attorney who represents the mother and son, said he doesn't comment on pending litigation.

Dottore's attorneys said they are in the process of working out a settlement with Dente's nephew for about \$700,000.

Mark Dente appears in court without an attorney

Dente currently has a criminal attorney but not a civil attorney, which is why he appeared in court by himself for the Jan. 6 trial.

After he arrived in court, Dente met with Dottore and the receiver's attorneys in chambers to see if they could reach a settlement, but that was unsuccessful.

Rob Glickman, one of Dottore's attorneys, said Dente informed them that he planned to invoke his Fifth Amendment privilege.

“Is that right?” Hein asked Dente.

“Yes, your honor,” Dente said.

Dottore said Dente told him during their discussion before the proceeding that he didn't want to stay for the trial.

“You don't have to stay,” Hein told Dente.

“I don't feel well,” Dente said.

“The fact that you don't feel well is probably understandable,” Hein said.

Dente then left the courtroom.

How much money is Mark Dente accused of making off investors?

Linscott testified that he reviewed 57 bank accounts for AEM and related companies for payments to Dente. He said he determined Dente received \$4,751,979.

Glickman said he will file a document with the court with their findings about how much Dente received from AEM by early next week.

Hein will then decide whether to issue a judgment against Dente for this amount.

Glickman said the attorneys will decide if they want to proceed with the rest of the civil lawsuit against Dente and his family, which seeks a judgment against Dente for more than \$190 million.

“We will think about what resources would be exerted and the possible success on the merits and what we would be able to recoup,” Glickman said. “We will be making that analysis on the remaining counts in the complaint.”

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