



BCPO News



Scott A. Coffina, Prosecutor

Philip S. Aronow

First Assistant Prosecutor

Darren N. Anderson

Chief of Detectives

Joel Bewley
BCPO Public Information Officer
Desk: 609-265-5777 Cell: 609-820-4407
jbewley@co.burlington.nj.us

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Third Defendant Pleads Guilty in “Paying it Forward” GoFundMe Scam

Agrees to repay restitution to victims, five-year prison term

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced that the remaining defendant behind the fictitious GoFundMe campaign pled guilty today to participating in the fraudulent scheme that misled donors into contributing more than \$402,000 to a fabricated cause.

Mark D’Amico, 40, of Florence, pled guilty in Superior Court to Misapplication of Entrusted Property (Second Degree). The Hon. Terrence R. Cook, P.J.Cr. scheduled sentencing for April 24, 2020.

“We are pleased that this defendant accepted responsibility for his role in this scam,” Prosecutor Coffina said. “He will be required to make full restitution to GoFundMe and the donors – the true victims in this case – and has agreed to a five-year term in New Jersey state prison.”

D’Amico was charged late last year along with his girlfriend at the time, Katelyn McClure of Bordentown, and Johnny Bobbitt of Philadelphia, with concocting a feel-good story that compelled more than 14,000 people to contribute money believing it would go to help Bobbitt, who was homeless and living on the streets of Philadelphia.

Bobbitt pled guilty in March to Conspiracy to Commit Theft by Deception (Second Degree), and was admitted into the Superior Court’s drug court program when sentenced in April. The program allows those with addiction problems to seek treatment instead of being incarcerated. However, if Bobbitt fails to adhere to the tightly-structured regimen of treatment and recovery services, which includes frequent testing for drug use, he could be sentenced to five years in state prison.

Under the terms of an agreement with the Prosecutor’s Office, McClure admitted that she advanced the false gas story at D’Amico’s direction, and pled guilty in April to Theft by Deception (Second Degree) in exchange for a four-year term in state prison. She has not yet been sentenced.

As part of their plea agreements, both McClure and Bobbitt also agreed to make restitution in the amount of \$402,706.

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The trio's "Paying it Forward" GoFundMe campaign was created on November 10, 2017, soon after D'Amico took a picture of McClure and Bobbitt standing in front of the Girard Avenue exit ramp on Interstate 95 in Philadelphia. The fairy tale narrative that accompanied the photo indicated that McClure had run out of gas, and Bobbitt spent his last \$20 to help her get back on her way.

The campaign listed a goal of \$10,000 to provide Bobbitt with rent for an apartment, a reliable vehicle and six months of living expenses, among other things. But the incoming funds far exceeded their expectations, and were quickly spent by McClure and D'Amico on casino gambling and personal items such as a BMW, a New Year's trip to Las Vegas, a helicopter ride over the Grand Canyon and Louis Vuitton hand bags.

Within a few months of the campaign's creation, all of the donated funds had been spent. Once he realized the money had been squandered, Bobbitt took civil action against D'Amico and McClure. He alleged in August 2018 through his attorneys that he had only received approximately \$75,000 of the funds raised on his behalf.

"Today's proceeding presents an opportunity to remind the public during the holidays to be cautious when considering making a charitable contribution," Prosecutor Coffina said. "Do your research, and make sure you are donating to a worthwhile cause."

The New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs encourages individuals to visit its website (<https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/charities>) for tips on avoiding charity scams, and to notify the agency about suspicious activity.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Andrew McDonnell, supervisor of the BCPO Financial Crimes Unit, and Assistant Prosecutor Saurabh Singal. The investigation was conducted by the Prosecutor's Office Financial Crimes Unit and High-Tech Crimes Unit, with assistance from the Florence Township Police Department.

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