

Patient-brokering plea nets prison time, probation

By Eliot Kleinberg
The Palm Beach Post

WEST PALM BEACH — A Lantana man who was one of several people charged in the fallout of the February 2017 arrest of treatment-center operator James Tomasso will spend six months in state prison and be on probation for three years after being convicted of patient brokering, according to court records.

Shawtee Oates, now 38, who was arrested May 23, pleaded guilty Monday and was sentenced to 366 days, with credit for the 167 he had already served, for a balance of 199 days. The time is concurrent for all 30 counts.

Oates also must pay a \$10,000 fine.



Oates

Patient brokering occurs when substance-abuse treatment centers pay sober homes — where addicts live while getting clean — to steer clients with private health insurance to them. The urine of insured people battling addiction is worth potentially millions of dollars to the centers. Those with addictions may be tested three or more times per week, and even partial reimbursement from insurers can pay \$1,500 to \$2,000 per sample.

In February 2017, the Sober Homes Task Force at the State Attorney's Office

arrested Tomasso, then 57, of Boca Raton, the owner and director of Global Recovery Resources. Police charged him with patient brokering, alleging he paid for referrals to one of his common-law wife's three treatment centers.

The task force's dealings with Tomasso have led to numerous arrests.

According to a Delray Beach police report, the task force discovered 30 checks totaling \$32,900 that Tomasso wrote to Oates between April 2016 and January 2017.

Tomasso told task force investigators the payments were in exchange for Oates referring clients to one of Tomasso's treatment centers for detoxification services.

ARRESTS

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that we have been charged with was done purposefully, knowingly or maliciously," Schnellenberger said.

According to the documents, authorities say Anyssa Schnellenberger opened a marketing company in 2016 that received kickbacks from two Delray Beach drug-testing centers — Impact Q Testing and Zenith Health Services — for patients referred by Recovery Boot Camp.

According to arrest reports, Impact Q Testing paid Anyssa Jordan Marketing Group, or AJMG, \$75,000 from June 30, 2016, until September 1, 2016, for referrals.

That was followed by \$77,000 in payments to AJMG from Zenith Health Services from December 8, 2016, to June 6, 2017, according to the reports.

The alleged criminal

activity was conducted before the Schnellenbergers wed on Nov. 13, 2017.

One witness said Timothy Schnellenberger "blatantly asked about commissions" for patient referrals, and another witness said he often complained the paybacks that AJMG received weren't big enough, according to the reports.

John Skeffington, the president of Zenith Health Services, told investigators he would go to Timothy Schnellenberger's Delray Beach home every Saturday and deliver a check made out to AJMG.

In his statement, Schnellenberger said that he and his family were "devastated" by the arrests, while adding he and his wife "look forward to presenting our side of the story and moving on as soon as possible."

The arrests were made as part of a crackdown by the State Attorney's Office's Sober Homes Task Force to stop sober-home owners and drug-treatment centers from profiting off their

patients' insurance claims and those who receive kickbacks for referring patients.

In a Palm Beach Post story from Jan. 23, Timothy Schnellenberger talked about his own struggles and that of his brother Stephen with substance abuse.

"The experience of watching what my parents went through drove me to help other addicts and their families," Schnellenberger said.

In January, Schnellenberger, along with his parents, opened the Schnellenberger Family Foundation, whose mission is to provide financial support for families of addicts.

"Beverlee and I are just so proud of Tim," Howard Schnellenberger said at the time. "He's a self-made man and now just wants to help others."

Staff researcher Melanie Mena and staff writer Christine Stapleton contributed to this story.

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STREAM

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100 people watch the live stream. It wasn't like we've had half the city watching. We want to be compliant, but it's cost prohibitive."

Malega doesn't buy that argument.

"I thought we were being penny-wise and dollar foolish and that we were stepping over \$100 to save \$10," she said. "I think there are more reasons why we're not paying to be compliant, it's just easier to disconnect the live streaming. We're spending money left and right on feasibility studies... but we can't fix something like this."

Boynton Beach also records its city hall meetings and then posts videos on the Boynton YouTube channel the next morning, the same as Lake Worth.

But not every city in Palm Beach County does that.

- Palm Beach Gardens airs meetings live, then also posts them the next day on YouTube for OnDemand access, according to Candice Temple, a city spokeswoman.

"We currently spend \$8,700 a year for LiveStream of city council meetings," Temple said. "We average 10-20 viewers per meeting. For us, it's not a great return on investment, but we are in the business of providing services and feel this is an important option to have available to our residents."

- Jupiter also airs council meetings, planning and zoning and community redevelopment meetings live, paying \$15,000 for the service. About 298 people watch those meetings, said Kate Moretto, Jupiter's spokeswoman.

- Wellington spends

"It can cost anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 for a meeting. But under 100 people watch the live stream. It wasn't like we've had half the city watching. We want to be compliant, but it's cost prohibitive."

Ben Kerr, city spokesman

about \$10,000 annually to live stream its meetings, according to Liz Nunez, a village spokeswoman.

- Channel 20 lives streams several Board of County Commission meetings and Palm Beach County School Board meetings live, according to Lester Williams, Channel 20's manager.

Since pulling live meetings, Lake Worth airs them on YouTube either a few minutes after the meeting or the next day.

"YouTube still provides some degree of closed captioning, so that's where we continue to make the meetings available," Kerr said. "YouTube is not the perfect option. It's the only option we have."

Kerr said Lake Worth aired meetings live for about a year before ending it in March.

"The annoying thing was we finally ironed out all the kinks and we had the system really running well," he said. "We just weren't compliant."

He said under 100 people watched, sometimes less than that.

"It was more than we were getting from people coming to commission meetings," Kerr said. "But sometimes it was a low as 20 or 25 people."

Lake Worth City Attorney Glen Torcivia said many municipalities and counties in Florida are seeing an increase in ADA lawsuits related to website accessibility. He said St. Lucie County was recently sued over its website and all the agencies in the county are in the process of becoming

compliant.

"Our firm has heard that compliance estimates are running about \$20,000 or higher depending on the website at issue," Torcivia said. "Rather than get hit with a lawsuit, in a worst case where not only do you pay your own legal fees, but the other side's legal fees as well as having to make the correction, the city took it all in," he said.

So far, Lake Worth residents don't seem that bothered by the switch.

"I don't even follow that," said Brian Kirsch. "I've attended a meeting a couple of weeks ago, but watching it live, that's something I've never done."

But there are residents who are upset the city stopped airing meetings live.

"The city is not putting in enough effort to fix the problem," said Robert Waples. "They're just doing a cover-up. I watched the meetings live because I work late hours and by the time I get home, I'm exhausted and don't want to go to a meeting after working 12 hours."

Craig Frost said it's unfortunate what the city has done.

"I know a lot more people would be involved if they could watch it live and understand what's going on," Frost said. "It was a plus to have it."

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An RDK Melanoma Foundation sunscreen application machine is unveiled by students from Dwyer and Jupiter high schools on the grounds of the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse in Jupiter Thursday. (RICHARD GRAULICH/PALMBEACHPOST.COM)

Students join forces to fight skin cancer

By Hannah Morse
The Palm Beach Post

Although a 10-minute drive separates them, Seth Rodgers won't say there's a rivalry between William T. Dwyer and Jupiter high schools.

"In football, we're not evenly matched," the 17-year-old Jupiter High senior said, laughing. Niko Tomc, a 17-year-old Dwyer junior, was within earshot and smiled at the dig.

Both teens are officers of their schools' respective Students Against Melanoma, or S.A.M., clubs, but they joined forces to install a sunscreen dispenser at a popular tourist destination: the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse and Museum.

The installation was Tomc's idea. Newly elected as vice president of the Jupiter S.A.M. club, he wanted to do something to make a difference.

The first place he thought of was the lighthouse, where he volunteers. He recounted the story of a visitor who asked if they sold sunscreen. They didn't.

"So many people come here from all over the country who may not understand how badly they need sunscreen here in Florida," Tomc said.

In researching sunscreen dispensers, Tomc came across one provided by the Richard David Kann Melanoma Foundation. It's yellow and looks like a hand-sanitizing station, but instead doles out free dollops of zinc oxide sunscreen.

Dwyer's S.A.M. club doesn't collect dues, so members needed to look elsewhere for donations. That's when Guanabanas, partially owned by Tomc's father, donated \$250 and Jupiter's club matched.

"It's kind of cool to collaborate for a social action project," Rodgers said.

This marks the 10th



Jupiter high freshman Liam Kanitsch, 14, helps unveil an RDK Melanoma Foundation sunscreen application machine on the grounds of the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse in Jupiter Thursday. (RICHARD GRAULICH/PALMBEACHPOST.COM)

sunscreen dispenser from the RDK Melanoma Foundation now spread throughout Jupiter, and Tomc said he wants to place even more dispensers. The foundation, based in West Palm Beach, is named after a man who died from melanoma at age 45.

Melanoma skin cancer forms in melanocytes, the cells that create a brown pigment called melanin.

Melanoma is considered one of the deadliest skin cancers, yet it makes up about only one percent of all skin cancers, according to the American Cancer Society. Basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers are more common.

The rate of melanoma diagnosis has increased over the past three decades. A little less than two-thirds of melanoma diagnoses are in men, and about 10 percent of people diagnosed with the skin cancer are expected to die from it.

The American Cancer Society said a good way to look out for possible signs of melanoma is to examine skin for spots that feature ABCDE: asymmetry, borders that are irregular, color of varying shades, diameter of more than six millimeters and evolving size, shape or color.

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RAISMAN

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why they're putting up such a fight," Raisman said. "I think it shows how corrupt they are and how much they're trying to cover up. Those people need to be gone."

Raisman said she's been trying to work with the organization on fixing its flaws and protecting athletes in the future.

"I hope one day USA Gymnastics is the leader in sexual abuse prevention," she said. "Right now, we look at them as an example of what not to do."

While she shared her criticisms, Raisman also addressed the parents and children in the Boca Raton audience directly with advice to combat pervasive sexual abuse.

"It's very hard to put into words. I'm just learning how to find ways..." she paused. "I just kind of threw myself into this. I never imagined it. I'm learning how to respond to it."

She encouraged the crowd to educate themselves on the signs of child sexual abuse. Coaches, doctors and other gymnastics officials should be forced learn about the signs and how to respond to allegations, Raisman said.

"When you push something away and try to forget it, it

comes back to haunt you," she said.

While she spoke at length during the 90-minute event about USA Gymnastics, Raisman also shared insight into her life outside the spotlight.

Raisman turned to meditation to help her cope with stress. She always carries essential oils; her favorite is peppermint, she said.

Her Jewish faith keeps her grounded, she told the crowd of mostly Jewish attendees. Raisman famously played the Hebrew folk song "Hava Nagila" during her gold-winning floor performance in the 2012 London Games.

"I didn't realize at the time how much it meant to the Jewish community," she said.

She ended the talk by sharing the two best pieces of advice she's received.

The first was from famous shoe designer Stuart Weitzman: "Don't let the Olympics be the highlight of your life."

Raisman's dedicated her post-Olympics life to raising awareness about child sexual abuse, "driven to make a difference," she said.

The second piece of advice was from her parents.

"They told me it's better to be kind than to be in first place on the podium," she said. "Winning isn't everything."

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