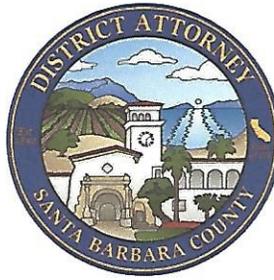


OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
JOYCE E. DUDLEY
District Attorney



DA 01-337

RELEASE NUMBER

January 14, 2016

RELEASE DATE

APPROVED BY: *Joyce E. Dudley*
JOYCE E. DUDLEY, DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Gary D. Gemberling, Deputy District Attorney

CONTACT PERSON (805) 568-2372

***** PRESS RELEASE *****

January 14, 2016

Re: *The People of the State of California v. Joseph Anthony Mele; Case No. 1476113*

Santa Barbara County District Attorney Joyce E. Dudley announced today that Joseph Anthony Mele, of Ventura, California, was sentenced today to ten years in state prison after pleading “no contest” to seven felony counts and two sentencing enhancements on November 12, 2015. This includes multiple counts of Financial Elder Abuse, in addition to Grand Theft, Embezzlement, Money Laundering, and Filing False Tax Returns.

Joseph Mele was previously employed as an insurance agent by his father, Anthony Mele, at Mele & Associates Senior Insurance Services in Ventura, California, where he became acquainted with the two elderly female victims. Mele was able to gain the trust of the two victims, age 93 and 74, while holding himself out to be a financial planner and then began purchasing, selling, and repurchasing long-term annuities and other types of insurance, without the victims’ knowledge. This “churning” of the victims’ policies allowed Mele to generate several hundred thousand dollars in commissions, and the victims to incur over \$400,000 in surrender fees, penalties, and lost premiums.

In early 2013, Mele had the 93-year old victim sign eight blank checks which Mele said he needed so that he “could move quickly on investments.” Between February 2013 and September 2014, Mele wrote \$800,000 worth of checks to himself for cash, and deposited them into his personal bank account. The victim’s money was then spent, among other things, on dining out, plastic surgery, elaborate vacations, sporting events, wedding photographs, and school tuition. At the time the theft was discovered, the 93-year old victim’s life savings had gone from almost \$1.5 million to \$200,000.

In commenting on the case, District Attorney Joyce Dudley acknowledged how well the California Department of Insurance, Santa Barbara Police Department, Franchise Tax Board, and Deputy District Attorney Gary Gemberling, worked together in bringing Joseph Anthony Mele to justice. District Attorney Dudley stated, “The exceptional effort and cooperation between state, county, and local law enforcement agencies played a significant role in obtaining a just and appropriate resolution and sentence. It is also a warning to those who seek to prey on vulnerable elders in this community that you will be arrested, prosecuted, and subject to severe punishment.”

District Attorney Dudley also wanted to commend the efforts of California Department of Insurance Investigator Tamara Kessler. “Investigator Kessler was able to recover all of the surrender fees, penalties, and interest from the insurance companies, which would otherwise have been lost. This allowed the victims to feel some sense of financial stability and security.”

Mele was remanded to custody to begin serving his 10 year sentence at the conclusion of today’s hearing.

□ SANTA BARBARA OFFICE
1112 Santa Barbara Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2300
Fax: (805) 568-2453

□ SANTA MARIA OFFICE
Santa Maria, CA 93454
312-D East Cook Street
(805) 346-7540
Fax: (805) 346-7588

□ LOMPOC OFFICE
115 Civic Center Plaza
Lompoc, CA 93436
(805) 737-7760
Fax: (805) 737-7732