



Longboat Key firm charged with operating a \$75 million foreign currency trading scheme

By John Hielscher
Staff Writer

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The Commodity Futures Trading Commission claims the Oasis International Group Ltd. of Longboat Key, CEO Michael J. DaCorta and others fraudulently misappropriated the majority of the funds they raised from 700 investors, and lost the rest in forex trading.

Federal regulators have charged a local investment firm and its principals with operating a \$75 million foreign currency trading scheme.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission claims the Oasis International Group Ltd. of Longboat Key, CEO Michael J. DaCorta and others fraudulently misappropriated the majority of the funds they raised from 700 investors, and lost the rest in forex trading.

A federal judge has already issued a restraining order freezing the assets of the defendants and appointed a Tampa attorney as receiver to take control of the corporations involved and the assets of the individual defendants.

The Oasis operation has been shut down, receiver Burton Wiand said Tuesday.

Those charged in the alleged scheme used \$18 million of investors' funds "for unauthorized personal or business expenses such as real estate purchases in Florida, exotic vacations, sports tickets, pet supplies, loans to family members, and college and study-abroad tuition," the 46-page complaint states.

The CFTC filed the civil enforcement action on April 15 under seal, which was lifted on Friday.

The defendants had not responded as of Tuesday to the complaint, filed in U.S. District Court in Tampa.

The lawsuit seeks restitution for investors, disgorgement of ill-gotten gains, civil penalties, trading bans and a permanent injunction against violating the federal Commodity Exchange Act.

At \$75 million, this alleged fraud would rank near the top among the numerous Ponzi-type scams that burned Southwest Florida investors in recent years.

Arthur Nadel, probably the most infamous local scammer, cost his clients more than \$160 million. Sarasota's Beau Diamond, a foreign exchange trader, took \$7 million from clients and lost another \$22 million in trading. Money managers John and Marian Morgan of Sarasota were convicted of stealing \$28 million from 87 victims. Gary and Todd Smith, two former advertising executives from North Carolina, were recently sentenced to prison terms for swindling \$63 million from investors in Sarasota and elsewhere.

According to the CFTC complaint, starting in 2014 the Oasis defendants raised \$75 million for two commodity pools from investors who were promised a minimum 12% annual return. Those pools claimed to yield 22% in 2017 and 21% last year.

But the pool operators deposited just \$21 million into forex trading accounts, all of which has been lost, the complaint states. Another \$28 million went for "Ponzi-like payments" to some pool investors, and the rest was spent on personal and business expenses of the Oasis operators.

"The defendants concealed their fraud by issuing false account statements to the pool participants," the CFTC said.

They used investor funds to buy the Oasis office at 444 Gulf of Mexico Drive, a house in Lakewood Ranch where DaCorta lives, and a house in The Founders Club where Oasis president and defendant Joseph S. Anile II resides, the complaint alleges.

DaCorta, a co-founder of Oasis, was permanently banned in 2010 from registering with the CFTC in a disciplinary settlement with the National Futures Association. He did not disclose that information to Oasis investors, according to

the complaint.

Other defendants include Francisco “Frank” L. Duran of Florida, Raymond P. Montie III of Jackson, New Hampshire, John J. Haas of New York, and several other corporations they control.

Wiand, appointed temporary receiver, has been the receiver in the Nadel Ponzi scheme case since 2009.

Oasis International is a Cayman Islands limited corporation founded in 2013 by DaCorta, Anile and Montie, the complaint said. They operated Oasis from the Longboat Key office.

A hearing on the CFTC’s motion for a preliminary injunction is scheduled for April 29.