

WINE DISTRIBUTOR ADMITS FRAUD

Collected \$872G for product featured on 'Shark Tank'

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A Long Island wine distributor pleaded guilty Monday to an almost \$1 million scheme, fraudulently taking advantage of publicity generated by the television show "Shark Tank."

Joseph Falcone, 59, admitted committing wire fraud in federal court in Central Islip by claiming to investors that he would use their money to buy and distribute single-serving,

sealed plastic glasses of wine — also known as wine-in-a-cup — that was featured on the television show, officials said.

Falcone collected \$872,000 from unidentified investors on Long Island, between September of 2014 and November of 2015, but spent \$527,000 of the money on buying a home in Florida and trading online in securities, according to officials.

The investors' money was supposedly to be used by Falcone's company, 3 G's Vino in

Bethpage and Farmingdale.

Falcone, now of Melbourne, Florida, theoretically faces up to 20 years in prison, but under the terms of a plea deal, he cannot appeal unless he is sentenced to more than 30 months in prison.

He must also forfeit \$527,000. He was released on \$500,000 bond, pending sentencing.

"Falcone lured investors into believing that they were funding an up-and-coming business," Eastern District U.S. Attorney Richard Donoghue said

in a statement. "This office will continue to protect the investing public by prosecuting to the fullest extent of the law those who use deceptive practices to enrich themselves."

Falcone and his attorney, Scott Druker, declined to comment afterward, as did Assistant U.S. Attorney Bradley King.

The business that produced the wine product was identified in court papers only as the John Doe Company. Victims are not usually named in federal court papers.

But sources identified the company as Copa da Vino.

The Oregon-based company was featured on "Shark Tank," in which prominent investors decide whether or not they wish to invest in startup companies, whose products are pitched by the startup's founders. In this case, the show made something of a stir when the wine-product company's founder twice turned down financing offers, as too little, by the show's supposed business experts.

Neither the show nor the company that produced the single-serving of wine had any connection to Falcone's scheme, officials said.

Nassau, Suffolk to get aid for early voting

BY SCOTT EIDLER
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New York State will reimburse Nassau and Suffolk counties about \$1.7 million each to cover the costs of early voting for a nine-day period before Election Day, while the counties look to use borrowed money for the rest of the multi-million-dollar expense.

The state Board of Elections had \$24 million to distribute to local election boards for early voting as part of the 2019-2020 state budget agreement.

The state Legislature approved early voting in January, months after annual municipal budgets had been set. Some lawmakers worried that the counties would not be able to afford the unbudgeted expense.

In Nassau, early voting is expected to run to \$3.7 million in capital costs, including for electronic poll books, which prevent revoting, and ballot-on-demand technology, which allows people to vote in any of Nassau's designated poll sites, said Bonnie Garone, counsel to Nassau's Democratic elections commissioner. Operational costs are about \$780,000, she said.

In March, the Nassau county legislature approved borrowing \$3.7 million for early voting.

The state Board of Elections awarded Nassau \$1,061,306 for capital expenses and more than \$737,314 in operating aid, such as poll workers' salaries, according to figures provided by the state agency. Suffolk County



Christina Leone casts her ballot on Sept. 13, 2018. Nassau and Suffolk will each get about \$1.7 million from the state for early voting costs.

will get \$1,001,253 for capital costs and \$671,470 for operational expenses. The figures must ultimately be approved by the state budget director.

Nassau County will open 15 poll sites. Suffolk will open 10. The Nassau sites are clustered largely in Hempstead Town, in the southern tier of the county, while there is one Suffolk poll site in each of the county's 10 towns.

A Suffolk legislative committee will consider a resolution on Thursday to authorize more than \$3 million in already bor-

rowed funds to comply with the early voting law.

Suffolk Republican Elections Commissioner Nicholas LaLota said state money represents less than 50 percent of the actual cost of early voting. "This mandate coming from Albany now must be borne by Suffolk County taxpayers to the tune of about \$1.4 million," LaLota said.

LaLota said the cost to implement early voting will run about \$2.74 million in 2019, while operational costs will total \$468,579.

Nassau Presiding Officer

Richard Nicoletto (R-New Hyde Park) said, "it's typical that the state would pass an initiative that has merit, but at the same time pushes most of the costs onto the local taxpayers. We've been fighting this battle for years and unfortunately, it's continuing."

Garone said, "Of course we'd rather see the state pay for all of it, but it doesn't look like that's what's going to happen. We believe they should have allocated more across the board, not just to us."

Assemb. Chuck Lavine (D-

Glen Cove), who advocated for local reimbursement during budget negotiations, said the distribution was "a fair approach."

"Roughly \$4 million that will be going to Nassau and Suffolk is quite proportional to the amount of voters that we have, and our population on a statewide basis," Lavine said. "We would always like to be able to spend more. I was pleased that in a difficult budgetary year in which our revenues were down substantially, the state government was able to arrange for this funding."

With Rachele Blidner