

## Ponzi scheme leads to prison

**JUST THE LORD: The operator of JTL Financial gets four years and three months for his role.**

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By DEVONA WELLS / The Press-Enterprise

Randall Harding was sentenced Monday to four years and three months in prison for his role in a \$58.5 million Inland area investment scam.



U.S. District Court Judge Virginia A. Phillips ordered Harding, who more than a year ago pleaded guilty to wire fraud and money laundering, to begin serving his sentence by Oct. 26. Harding left the courthouse after the 50-minute hearing with friends and family.



*Mark Zaleski / The Press-Enterprise*

Randall Harding, right, former president of JTL Financial tries to hide behind friends after leaving Riverside Federal Courthouse on Monday.

Harding, his attorney James Henderson and other supporters, including some investors, declined comment. U.S. Attorney Dennise Willett said after the hearing she was pleased with the sentence.

Harding ran JTL Financial Group, also called Just the Lord, which fed money to MX Factors -- a Riverside-based firm that authorities say raised money from more than 500 people through a Ponzi scheme, which pays earlier investors with money from later ones.

Investor Kevin Sullivan, whose parents also gave money to JTL, attended the hearing, wearing a shirt from Harding that said "Just the Lord" on the front. Harding recruited some investors at Crossroads Christian Church in Corona, where he previously sang in the choir.

"I'm happy justice was served," Sullivan said.

Before Phillips sentenced Harding, she said that he played less of a role in the scheme than the case's three other defendants. Thomas G. Hawkesworth and Daniel J. Berardi -- who ran BBH Resources in Palm Desert and funneled the money to MX Factors -- were sentenced in June. Hawkesworth got four years and nine months; Berardi was sentenced to five years and 10 months. A warrant was issued in 2004 for MX Factors President Richard Harkless.

Phillips noted the significant number of victims and amount of money lost but also said it was difficult to sentence Harding, because he appeared to not know he was perpetrating a fraud.

"By all accounts, he's a very hard-working man. He lost a great deal of money himself," Phillips said.

John Moody, an investor who spoke at the hearing, took issue with Harding's attorney describing his client as contrite.

"We've never received any apologies," Moody said.

But Adam Price, worship pastor at Crossroads, defended Harding. Price invested more than \$150,000, according to court records.

"I think he's innocent of so much of what's been brought up," Price said.

Moments before he was sentenced, Harding apologized.

"I'm very sorry for my role in this," he said.

Harding's attorney requested he be sent to the Bureau of Prisons' Taft facility, where Berardi and Hawkesworth also are incarcerated.

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