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agency's most prominent and high-profile investigations of 2021.

Jan. 08, 2022



The IRS Criminal Investigation division began counting down the top 10 cases for calendar year 2021 on its [Twitter](#) account on Jan. 3. These cases include the agency's most prominent and high-profile investigations of 2021.

“The investigative work of 2021 has all the makings of a made for TV movie – embezzlement of funds from a nonprofit, a family fraud ring that stole millions in COVID-relief funds and a \$1 billion Ponzi scheme used to buy sports teams and luxury vehicles. But this is real life and I’m grateful to our IRS-CI agents for pursuing these

leads and ensuring that the perpetrators were prosecuted for their crimes,” said IRS-

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management to hundreds of people with special needs.

9. Rochester man going to prison and ordered to pay millions in restitution for his role in Ponzi scheme that bilked investors out of millions of dollars

John Piccarreto Jr. was sentenced to 84 months in federal prison and ordered to pay restitution totaling \$19,842,613.66 after he was convicted of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and filing a false tax return. He conspired with others to obtain money through an investment fraud Ponzi scheme.

8. Orlando sisters sentenced in \$25 million tax fraud scheme

Petra Gomez and her co-conspirator, her sister, Jakeline Lumucso, were sentenced to eight and four years in federal prison, respectively. They operated a tax preparation business with five locations in central Florida that filed more than 16,000 false tax returns for clients from 2012 to 2016 with a total estimated loss to the IRS of \$25 million.

7. Russian bank founder sentenced for evading exit tax upon renouncing U.S. citizenship

Oleg Tinkov, aka Oleg Tinkoff, was ordered to pay more than \$248 million in taxes and sentenced to time-served and one year of supervised release after he renounced his U.S. citizenship in an effort to conceal large stock gains that were reportable to the IRS after the company he founded became a multibillion dollar, publicly traded company.

6. Ontario man who ran multimillion-dollar unlicensed bitcoin exchange business sentenced to 3 years in federal prison

Hugo Sergio Mejia was sentenced to three years in federal prison and required to forfeit all assets derived from running an unlicensed business that exchanged at least

\$13 million in Bitcoin and cash, and vice versa, often for drug traffickers. He charged

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conspiracy engaged in a complicated money laundering scheme where U.S.-based associates would accept victim funds, convert these funds to cryptocurrency, and transfer the cryptocurrency to foreign-based money launderers.

4. Ex-pastor of Orange County church sentenced to 14 years in federal prison for orchestrating \$33 million con that defrauded investors

Kent R.E. Whitney, the ex-pastor of the Church of the Health Self, was sentenced to 14 years in federal prison and ordered to pay \$22.66 million in restitution to victims after defrauding investors of \$33 million by orchestrating a church-based investment scam. At his direction, church representatives appeared on television and at live seminars to make false and misleading claims to lure investors to invest in church entities. Victims sent more than \$33 million to the church and received fabricated monthly statements reassuring them that their funds had been invested, when in reality, little to no money ever was.

3. Prairie Village Man Sentenced to 12 Years for \$7.3 Million Dollar Payday Loan Fraud, \$8 Million Tax Evasion

Joel Tucker was sentenced to 12 years and six months in federal prison and ordered to pay over \$8 million in restitution to the IRS after selling false information or fictitious debts to payday loan businesses and not filing federal tax returns – for himself or his businesses – with the IRS for multiple years.

2. DC Solar owner sentenced to 30 years in prison for billion dollar Ponzi scheme

Jeff Carpoff, the owner of California-based DC Solar, was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison and forfeited \$120 million in assets to the U.S. government for victim restitution after creating a Ponzi-scheme that involved the sale of thousands of manufactured mobile solar generator units (MSGs) that didn't exist. He committed

account and lease revenue fraud and purchased a sports team, luxury vehicles, real

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tax documents to the Small Business Administration, and then used the funds they received to purchase luxury homes, gold coins, jewelry designer handbags and more. Richard Ayvazyan and his wife Terabelian cut their ankle monitoring devices and absconded prior to their sentencing hearing; they are currently fugitives.

Follow IRS-CI on Twitter [@IRS_CI](#) to learn more.

IRS-CI is the criminal investigative arm of the IRS, responsible for conducting financial crime investigations, including tax fraud, narcotics trafficking, money-laundering, public corruption, healthcare fraud, identity theft and more. IRS-CI special agents are the only federal law enforcement agents with investigative jurisdiction over violations of the Internal Revenue Code, boasting a nearly 90 percent federal conviction rate. The agency has 20 field offices

Digital Currency

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