PROPERTY CASUALTY 360°

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Crime doesn't pay for the newest members of the Hall of Shame

By: Dennis Jay

Bottom feeders bubbled to the surface when the newest crop of miscreants and misfits were chosen for the Insurance Fraud Hall of Shame. The No-Class of 2017 was officially dishonored by the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud (the Coalition).

The Hall of Shame recognizes America's worst convicted insurance scammers of the year. These moral invertebrates live by the rule of flaw and excel at being vicious and brazen.

Consider the Hall of Shame a weapon of mass instruction that encourages honesty with all insurance dealings. Commit fraud and you're as doomed as a lobster in a restaurant tank.

Dishonoring these barons of bleak helps to reverse a lax mindset that lets this $80-billion crime persist year after year.

Far too many average consumers think it's alright to defraud insurers in certain situations, as soon-to-be-released research from the Coalition shows. People often view fraud as a lucrative, low-risk windfall. Nobody's harmed and insurers won't miss the money, right? Victimless-crime syndrome is an airborne disease, and the bacteria spreads unless challenged.

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Coalition Against Insurance Fraud

These shamers bring attention to insurance fraud as their true-life crime sagas rise above the hundreds of messages constantly vying for our attention. The shamers also serve as deterrents because their downfalls encourage more people to rethink their decisions and stay honest. Maybe a jail cell, personal ruin and your kids seeing you in prison stripes isn't worth the risk.

So meet the No-Class of 2017. They gambled, danced on dynamite, and lost everything.Bumper crop

Michael Charles Young masterminded one of Sacramento's largest staged-crash rings ever. It was an attempted $500,000 insurer looting.

Young bought cars through Craigslist, including many already damaged. He recruited friends and relatives to crash them, and invented paper wrecks.

Young gave his paid crashers written scripts to follow when talking with insurers. About half of all claimed crashes involved stolen IDs used to register vehicles and file claims.

About 65 cronies and 100 vehicles were involved. Young used large numbers of vehicles and cohorts to cover up and evade detection. The vehicles also "crashed" only once to avoid suspicious claim patterns.

Investigators busted the scheme after watching one of Young's vehicles. The old heap never moved and was in such lousy shape that Young towed it to an insurance office to file a claim. He lied it was damaged in a collision that weekend. Young was towed to state prison for 10 years.

Burning ambition

David O'Dell thought Joseph Meyers was his best friend. Meyers thought O'Dell was disposable. Meyers and his wife Iryn burned him alive, torching his home for insurance payouts in Steuben County, N.Y.

Meyers and Iryn simply wanted O'Dell for insurance money. They'd collect $140,000 from coverage on a house they let O'Dell live in, home possessions and a life policy. The place burned up, and O'Dell was incinerated alive — his body a shrunken pile of dried-black flesh.

Surveillance footage showed the couple driving to O'Dell's home the night of the fire and carrying a propane torch plus a container of liquid. Joseph and Iryn each earned 23 years to life.

View the entire article. View other articles quoting the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud.

Flame and blames

The godfather of a massive arson ring stole about $1 million by torching homes and vehicles. Verdon Taylor's ring bought cheap homes and cars at auctions and foreclosure sales in the Richmond, Va. area. The ring over-insured and then torched them — 30 fires during a 16-year binge.

Ring members stuffed mobile and rental homes with furniture and clothing bought at flea markets or auctions. They re-used property they burned for earlier claims. Scammers often set fires just days after buying policies. Fire claims ranged up to $300,000. Taylor faces up to 50 years in federal prison when sentenced.

Unsober sober homes

Kenny Chatman spooned drugs to desperate addicts in his sober homes so they'd keep relapsing. Prolonging their addiction incited more than $25 million of inflated and often worthless rehab and drug testing claims in South Florida.

Addicts trying to get clean kept overdosing into misery at Chatman's corrupt healing homes. He also pimped out female addicts for extra cash. His corrupt sober-home empire was the poster child for a deadly opioid epidemic that made South Florida the epicenter of sober-home fraud in the U.S. Chatman was handed 27 1/2 years in federal prison.

Uncaring homecare

More than 11,000 healthy people were declared sick, infirm and homebound in Dr. Jacques Roy's mammoth $375-million looting of Medicare and Medicaid. The Dallas physician ran the largest and most-brazen home-healthcare con in U.S. history. Roy's recruiters bribed residents of homeless shelters to be phony "patients," and also knocked on strangers' doors.

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Baby killer

Nearly broke, Joaquin Rams wanted to live the good life. He murdered his 15-month-old baby Prince for more than $500,000 of life-insurance money.

Little Prince died at Rams' home in Northern Virginia. Investigators were unsure if Prince was drowned or suffocated. But Joaquin's shaky finances revealed his murder motive. Unemployed, he planned an expensive home upgrade and seemed strangely unemotional.

Rams was handed life without parole. Prince's murder touched off a national debate. Why would life insurers cover a baby for so much money?

Sinking feeling

Vincent Viafore drowned when his kayak capsized in the frigid Hudson (N.Y.) River. His fiancée Angelika Graswold tampered with the craft to ensure Vincent would tip over — earning her $250,000 in life insurance.

The river was cold and choppy near West Point. Viafore vanished underwater, his kayak adrift. He had no chance in the bone-chilling waters.

Graswald acted strangely after Viafore died. She sang "Hotel California" at a local pub, and posted social-media selfies showing her doing a cartwheel. It "felt good knowing he was going to die," she told investigators. Graswald awaits sentencing.

Out of luck, on the run

Flamboyant lawyer Eric Conn stole more than $550 million by inventing injured and disabled patients. It was one of the biggest lootings of federal disability money in U.S. history.

Conn helped injured people in the impoverished Kentucky and West Virginia coalfields collect disability payouts. Then he got greedy. Conn bribed a judge and doctors to rubber-stamp thousands of phony disability claims.

Conn also forged medical records before doctors even examined patients. He finally was busted, yet slipped out of his tracking bracelet and disappeared. Conn received 12 years in prison while on the run.

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