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Stanford Officer Pendergest Holt Said To Have Plea Deal

By Laurel Brubaker Calkins and Andrew Harris - Jun 19, 2012 12:01 AM ET

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Q QUEUE

Laura Pendergest Holt, the former chief investment officer for R. Allen Stanford, has agreed to plead guilty and serve three years in prison for her role in a \$7 billion fraud, three people familiar with the matter said.

Pendergest Holt, 38, will plead guilty to a single obstruction charge, said one of the people, all of whom asked not to be identified because the plea agreement isn't public.

She faces a September trial on charges related to those that resulted in Stanford being sentenced on June 14 to 110 years in prison. Prosecutors had requested a maximum sentence of 230 years against Stanford, based on investors losses on bogus certificates of deposit sold by Antigua-based Stanford International Bank Ltd.

Pendergest Holt has denied wrongdoing. Dan Cogdell, her lead attorney, didn't return phone and e-mail messages yesterday seeking comment on a plea agreement. Pendergest Holt is scheduled for re-arraignment on July 21 in federal court in Houston, according to court r

Pendergest Holt had told Stanford Financial Group Co. investors and the firm s financial advisers that she oversaw a stable of international money managers who were responsible for the bulk of the banks assets, according to court papers. She may have had authority over as little as 20 percent of the banks assets, according to testimony during Stanfords trial.

Prosecutors charged her in June 2009 with conspiring to mislead investors in conjunction with Stanford and Chief Financial Officer James M. Davis, her boss and former lover. During Stanford s trial, Davis told jurors he had a three-year affair with Pendergest Holt that ended in 2003, and that Stanford approved of the romance between his two top deputies.

Alisa Finelli, a Justice Department spokeswoman, declined to comment on the reported plea agreement.

Stanford, 62, was convicted in March by a federal court jury in Houston of leading a massive fraud in which later investors funds were used to pay above-market returns to earlier investors. He was accused of secretly borrowing more than \$2 billion in depositors funds to finance a lavish lifestyle and several money-losing businesses.

Stanford is appealing his March 6 conviction and his sentence.

Joan Stack, former global human resources manager at Stanford Financial Group, testified during Stanford's trial that Davis and Pendergest Holt routinely hired unqualified relatives and fellow church members to staff most positions in the Memphis, Tennessee, research division that oversaw the bank's multibillion-dollar investment portfolio.

They were family members who had no experience in doing what we'd hired them to do," Stack said.

Holt invested about \$2 million of the banks portfolio in a hedge fund run by her husband, a former personal trainer, according to testimony.

The case is U.S. v. Stanford, 4:09-cr-0342, U.S. District Court, Southern District of Texas (Houston).

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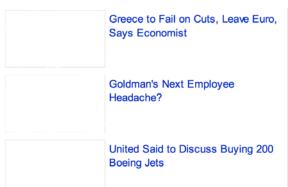
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