

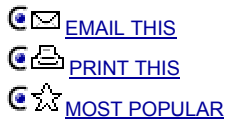
Official saw end while aiding FBI

By [RICHARD WHITT](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 02/12/04

When Josh Kenyon saw the photographs, his heart sank.



"I thought, 'Well, this ship's going down,' " Kenyon says.

As chief of staff for then-Fulton County Commission Chairman Mitch Skandalakis, Kenyon figured he was leading the FBI to his own door when he identified two men pictured in the grainy photographs. In the photos, taken by a Red Lobster security camera, one man was passing a newspaper to the other one. Hidden inside the newspaper was a stack of cash.

Kenyon had reason for concern. The man taking the money was Michael Hightower, then a Fulton County commissioner. The man was Atlanta businessman George Greene, whose company had a \$12 million contract with the county. FBI agents didn't know it at the time, but Kenyon also had taken payoffs from Greene.

Caught on camera

The pictures put Kenyon at the center of a federal investigation that eventually brought down Hightower, Greene, Skandalakis and Kenyon himself. Hightower, Greene and Kenyon all pleaded guilty to various corruption charges, while Skandalakis pleaded guilty to lying to an FBI agent. Greene and Skandalakis were sentenced Thursday to prison terms, and Kenyon also faces six months in prison. Hightower has served six months in prison.

Kenyon says he was doing a favor for his friend Oliver Halle, an FBI agent, when he agreed in 1999 to look at the photographs that were taken at the restaurant on Old National Highway.

Halle told Kenyon that a suspicious restaurant employee had contacted the FBI about a conversation she had overheard between the two men in the pictures. She thought that one was an elected official and the other was paying him off. She obtained the videotape from a restaurant surveillance camera and turned it over to authorities. But neither Halle nor the employee, who has not been publicly identified, could identify the men.

So Halle called Kenyon.

Torn between friends

The FBI agent and county official had struck up a friendship in 1995, after Kenyon contacted the FBI to report that a Norcross lawyer was trying to bribe Skandalakis. Kenyon agreed to wear a hidden recording device to help collect the evidence needed to convict lawyer Frantz of attempted bribery. Kenyon proudly displayed a plaque the FBI gave him after the conviction.

Kenyon met with Halle at a bagel shop on North Druid Hills Road to examine the security camera photographs. Kenyon immediately recognized the men shown. "I was forced to identify the guy I was taking money from," he says.

Kenyon admits he was torn. The photographs, he knew, weren't conclusive proof that Hightower and Greene were guilty. Kenyon says he could have kept his mouth shut or steered agents in the wrong direction. He could have informed Greene and Hightower, and the two of them could have devised a plan to escape FBI scrutiny.

But he had promised Halle to keep the matter confidential. And he didn't want to betray a confidence.

"It put me in an odd situation," Kenyon says. "I was friends with both Oliver and Greene. Once I identified them," he says, referring to the men in the photographs, "I knew it was a matter of time until it came back to me."

SAVE MONEY
WITH
BETTER
INTEREST



EQUIPMENT

Helping others

Months passed before the FBI confronted Hightower with the Red Lobster pictures. Hightower admitted taking cash from Greene. G agreed to cooperate with authorities. He then told the FBI he had also paid \$14,000 in cash to Kenyon.

Halle says he was shocked when he learned that Kenyon was taking money from Greene. "He's actually a good guy who screwed u says.

Kenyon now calls himself "a perfect example of why crime doesn't pay."

Kenyon was sentenced in December to serve six months and waits for the U.S. Bureau of Prisons to tell him when to begin serving sentence.

When he gets out, he may have a job waiting. Halle, Kenyon and Gerald Free, convicted of paying bribes to the mayor of Paterson, hope to go into business together, conducting seminars on the temptations and consequences of white-collar crime.

"It will be sort of a corporate 'Scared Straight,' " says Halle.