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FROM PAGE A1

# Cops: Embezzlement spanned 3 years

THE TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT

Cambria County detectives have charged that Allegra Rastall, a member of the Johnstown Redevelopment Authority's board, embezzled \$152,041 from a 91-year-old woman for whom she had power of attorney.

The following is a timetable of what authorities contend occurred:

**April 29, 1999:** Rastall cashes \$35,000 certificate of deposit belonging to the woman.

**April 30, 1999:** Rastall cashes two CDs belonging to the victim valued at \$39,284.74. Of that money, \$37,000 was made into a cashier's check for Rastall and \$1,300 was placed into the account of Bifano's Groceria, 411 Daniel St.,

owned by Allegra and Todd Rastall.

**Jan. 13, 2000:** Mrs. Rastall withdraws \$31,379.86 from the woman's savings account, draining the account.

**May 3, 2000:** Records show the two cashier's checks written out to Mrs. Rastall from the certificates of deposit are used to pay off a commercial loan.

**Between October 1999 and April 2002:** Mrs. Rastall misrepresents \$9,950 in checks, some of which were deposited into Bifano's account.

**May 13:** A protective service investigator for Cambria County Area Agency on Aging interviews the victim.

The investigator obtains a notice of cancella-

tion for the woman's fire insurance, and a past-due tax statement.

A checkbook turned over to the investigator shows two checks totaling \$3,500 that were not properly recorded.

**May 15:** Copies of those two checks are provided to authorities by Cenwest Bank on Franklin Street. The checks were written to Bifano's Groceria and its lottery account, authorities said.

**June 17:** Authorities obtain a search warrant for Mrs. Rastall's financial records.

**Feb. 28:** Mrs. Rastall is charged with eight counts of theft and misapplication of entrusted property.

## OUT

Continued from A1

had power of attorney for the past seven years.

Court documents show a large portion of that money was deposited into accounts for Bifano's Groceria or to pay off a commercial loan.

Repeated telephone calls to Rastall's home on Osborne Street went unanswered. No one responded to numerous knocks on her door, though a little girl peeked her head through the blinds and then went upstairs.

Two years ago, Bifano's Groceria was torched to cover up a burglary, authorities said. The crime remains unsolved. The fire caused about

\$80,000 in damage, gutting the store.

Neighbors remain skeptical about who set the fire, saying two large dogs at a home next door, which were out in the yard that night, did not bark and a loud burglar alarm at Bifano's never sounded.

In November, Cambria County Court records show the store was transferred solely into the name of Rastall's husband, Todd. Last month, documents reveal the house on Osborne Street was turned over to Mrs. Rastall.

Sources and neighbors said the couple is separated.

Mrs. Rastall has continued to serve on the five-member redevelopment board since her term expired Dec. 31.

Mayor Don Zucco said he is scheduled to interview a final candidate to

fill her post tomorrow.

"We'll make a decision at Wednesday's council meeting," he said in a telephone interview. "I'm almost completed with the process."

Mrs. Rastall is accused by Cambria County District Attorney's Office of illegally cashing \$152,041.20 in certificates of deposit and savings bonds belonging to the Boyd Avenue woman.

After being arraigned, she immediately waived her right to a preliminary hearing and could stand trial as soon as May, authorities said. She is charged with eight counts of theft and misapplication of entrusted property.

"I hope they're wrong," Councilwoman Nancy Malloy said. "I feel badly. She's a very likable, very bright person. I can't imagine her doing anything so stupid."

"If it's true, she's in a lot of trouble," Malloy added in a telephone interview.

Zucco and Mrs. Rastall have clashed for years.

Six years ago, Zucco defeated her husband, a former city councilman, for mayor.

After taking office, he reversed Mrs. Rastall's appointment to the redevelopment authority by his predecessor, former Mayor Linda Weaver. Zucco instead tried to keep incumbent Willis DeBouse on the board.

Mrs. Rastall sued in county court, claiming her appointment was repealed for political reasons. The state Supreme Court eventually upheld her appointment, and she joined the board in 2000.

## DIRECTOR

Continued from A1

town's oldest black-owned business.

She also was a landlord and bail bondswoman. Through the years, Miss Gordon had been a city alderman, traffic court magistrate and tax assessor.

Her friend was a humble lady and, in a quiet fashion, helped many young people attend college, Mrs. Carter said.

Mrs. Carter, past president of the Johnstown chapter of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said Miss Gordon meant much to the organization.

She said Miss Gordon was one of the first lifetime members in the Johnstown chapter and was active in the chapter's Women In NAACP organization. Its mission is to serve the community.

Mrs. Carter said Miss Gordon will be missed by many.

Perhaps her good nature was best exemplified last year.

In April, Miss Gordon was taken by an ambulance to a hospital, prompting rumors she had died. The feisty Miss Gordon quickly quelled the rumor by taking out an advertisement in The Tri-

bune-Democrat stating she was in the best of health, and by attending as many community functions as possible.

Miss Gordon lifted the burden off many families during their time of bereavement through her professionalism, Mrs. Carter said in a telephone interview.

She said Miss Gordon was a talented funeral director.

"Her skills brought comfort to families," Mrs. Carter said. "Families respected her. They knew everything would be OK with her in charge."

She said Miss Gordon was a compassionate woman.

"She loved people," Mrs. Carter said. "She had a very good heart. She touched many lives in a good way."

The Rev. Ralph E. Johnson Sr., pastor of St. James Missionary Baptist Church in Johnstown's Hornerstown section, said Miss Gordon really cared about the families she served as a funeral director.

"She wanted to help people," he said in a telephone interview.

He said she was a supporter of St. James who cared about the church and assisted the community in a variety of ways.

"She meant a lot," he said.

Miss Gordon never married and had no children.

Dorothy Thomas, past president of the Johnstown NAACP chapter, said Miss Gordon was kind and generous and especially liked helping young people.

She said Miss Gordon was instrumental in starting the Johnstown chapter of Women In NAACP in 1979. The chapter held dances to raise money and Miss Gordon always bought plenty of tickets, giving them to young people to attend the dance.

Miss Gordon — without fanfare — also helped students attend college, Mrs. Thomas said.

"She loved helping people," Mrs. Thomas said. "She had a genuine interest in people and the community."

Miss Gordon was an intelligent person and had a down-to-earth personality, Mrs. Thomas said. She said Miss Gordon enjoyed visiting different churches in the area and supported all of them.

Friends will be received from 5 to 9 p.m. tomorrow at St. James Missionary Baptist Church, 400 Pine St., Johnstown. A funeral service will be held at 1 p.m. Saturday at St. James.

Miss Gordon will be buried in her native Georgia.

## FEDS

Continued from A1

that's sure to increase soon.

Hanley said the Somerset office will function only until a Flight 93 memorial is finished — which will take more than three years under federal legislation passed last year.

"Once the memorial is opened, we want to be as close to it as possible," Hanley said.

Hanley said the federal General Services Administration will solicit proposals and select an office in Somerset.

"They'll let me know when they find something," she said.

Preliminary plans call for a handful of employees here, including Hanley and her secretary.

"We're going to have an empty desk for anybody who's in town and wants to work there," Hanley said.

The move, coming just as the Flight 93 Memorial Task Force begins its work, brings a central player in the planning much closer to the crash site just outside of Shanksville.

"I think the fact that the park service is committing themselves to a local presence is an indicator of their commitment to this," Pamela Tokar-Ickes, Somerset County commissioner, said in a telephone interview yesterday.

"Really, this is the first step in what will be a long-term presence," Tokar-Ickes said.

County Judge Kim Gibson, Flight 93 Memorial Task Force co-chairman, echoed those sentiments.

"It will be good to have them here," Gibson said in a telephone interview. Gibson said the memorial task force likely will continue to meet at Shanksville-Stonycreek High School because of the sheer size of the group. Their first meeting was Saturday, and the next session is scheduled for May 10.

But smaller committees formed within the task force could meet at the park service's Somerset office, Gibson said.

The task force, a still-unnamed federal advisory commission and the park service have many overlapping jobs in creating a site. Input will come from a variety of groups including local residents, officials and those who lost loved ones on Flight 93.

Hanley said her staff will consider three main issues: Boundaries for a Flight 93 memorial, planning for the memorial itself and arranging for a "new unit of the park service."

That last aspect includes planning for all features of a national park aside from a memorial, including office space and visitors' facilities.

"It's what's going to happen on the rest of the land," Hanley said.

## SPANS

Continued from A1

Pennsylvania has 213 covered bridges, down from a peak of 1,500, said Joyce Soroka, a member of the Bedford County group and vice president of Theodore Burr Covered Bridge Society of Pennsylvania Inc.

Despite the significant loss of its covered bridges, once known as kissing bridges, Pennsylvania continues to have the largest number in the nation, said Soroka, of Harrisburg.

Ohio is second with 104 bridges, she told society members.

"I think everyone thinks of Vermont when they think of covered bridges, but it's because of the way they promote them," she said.

Soroka praised the "bridgers" and especially

society founder Sandra Crawford, who is stepping aside to allow others to take over.

Crawford of Everett said she was prompted to start the society after the 1983 flood that devastated much of Hyndman and heavily damaged the nearby Herline Covered Bridge.

Through the efforts of Crawford and the society, the bridge was rebuilt and reopened in 1997.

With the help of federal dollars, seven of the eight bridges belonging to the county were repaired between 1992 and 2000.

One bridge Crawford and the society were never able to see rebuilt was the McDaniel Covered Bridge outside Breezewood. It burned to the ground in 1987 at the hands of an arsonist.

"This group was like the watchdog after the McDaniel Covered Bridge burned," Soroka said. "Oftentimes when we were trying to get other

counties to do something, we would point to the society in Bedford County as the role model."

The Aug. 14 arson of the Ryot bridge was an incentive for the group to reorganize and again call attention to the bridges and the role they play in the county, members said.

The county commissioners have pledged to a \$300,000 rebuild of the bridge, two miles south of Route 56 near Fishertown.

Tice was elated that the organization is re-forming.

"Covered bridges are very important to Bedford County tourism and the economy," he said. "We will do everything we can to help them."

Longtime member Mary Robinette of Bedford is taking over the leadership role on a temporary basis.

The group will next meet at 10 a.m. April 2 at the Everett library.

## PACT

Continued from A1

Arbitration failed once before, and neither side holds out much hope for it to work this time, but it is required under state law after a strike.

Teachers struck in December, after three years of bargaining failed to produce an agreement.

Salary scale and health insurance premiums have been the sticking points.

The only changes teachers made were:

- Changing language regarding their wish not to pay any part of a

health care premium.

■ Asking that leave time from the federal Family and Medical Leave Act not run concurrent with other leaves.

The current policy of counting other leaves also as part of the 12-week FMLA time "defeats the purpose of having FMLA," Critchfield said.

The district proposal, made public Tuesday, calls for teachers to pay 20 percent of their monthly health care premiums, rather than the 10 percent the district had been asking for.

Increased costs are the reason, school board President John Coleman said.

The union proposal was not a sur-

prise to Coleman, who called it unacceptable.

In a telephone interview, he said, "We realize that coming to an agreement is going to be very difficult — even more so than last time."

"No other teachers groups in the entire area are paying a premium for their basic health care," Critchfield said of the district's proposal.

The new district offer also would end early retirement incentive payments.

Both offers are available at district offices, where comments may be submitted. The comments, if signed, will be considered by the neutral arbiter assigned to the case.

The school board intends to place both proposals on a Web site set up to handle strike and negotiations news, www.sasdbord.net.

"We really think public information is key," district Business Manager Richard Whiskey said in an interview in his office.

Part of the reason is that, in May, five of nine school board seats are up for election. Though all five are running, they will be opposed by a slate of candidates backed by the union.

The arbitration hearing will begin in two weeks. Last summer's arbitration took several months, but the process is expected to go much faster this time.

## WORKERS

Continued from A1

freeze call engendered a range of reactions.

"I think, in general, people do not believe the problem is as bad as he's making it sound," said Ric LeBlanc, an attorney general's employee.

"Most people think it's not necessary."

Last fall, when talks weren't as imminent, state union leaders had indicated priorities for them in this negotiating cycle would be maintain-

ing health benefits and job security.

But yesterday, leaders said little about Rendell's proposed freeze, noting they haven't seen any specific economic proposals from the administration yet, let alone begun negotiations.

"We'll just have to wait and see what transpires across the bargaining table," said David Fillman, executive director of Council 13 of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, the state workers' largest union.

The average state worker's salary last year was \$41,405, with benefits costing an additional \$13,112.

## DIPLOMATS

Continued from A1

in a statement issued in Washington.

"The United States has requested the departure of two attaches from the Iraq Mission to the United Nations. Nazih Abdul Latif Rahman and Yehia Naeem Suaoud have been asked to depart by midnight March 7," it said.

"The two attaches were engaged in activities outside the scope of their official function. Federal law enforcement authorities deemed the

activities to be harmful to our national security."

The men have the ranks of attaches but are not on the list of personnel accredited to the United Nations, Al-Douri said.

The U.S. government has asked roughly 60 countries to expel selected Iraqis that American officials say are undercover intelligence officers, U.S. officials said yesterday, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

It is feared that some of those Iraqis planned to carry out attacks in retaliation for any U.S. invasion of Iraq, the official said.