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Embezzlement suspect arrested

Authorities believe woman took more than \$30,000 from pair of dental offices

KATHERINE ROSENBERG NOVEMBER 23, 2006

VICTORVILLE — After months of reviewing financial statements and business audits, detectives arrested a woman Wednesday for reportedly embezzling more than \$30,000 from two dental offices over the past 13 months.



Desert Mesa Estates is open 6 days a week, 11:00 to 4:00, located at 14520 Flamingo, Cal American Real Estate at (760) 243-2000.

The District Attorney's office filed four felony charges against Debra Reynolds, 41, of Victorville.

Investigators believe Reynolds told patients to bring cash to their appointments only to then pocket the green herself, said Detective John Wickum of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Victorville station. He added that Reynolds is suspected of having the dentist sign blank checks for office supplies, then writing the checks — some for as much as \$4,000 — out to herself.

According to Wickum, Reynolds began working at a Victorville dentist's office in August of 2001 and was employed as a registered dental assistant until January 2005, when she took over as office manager. The trouble, he said, began soon after.

Investigators found Reynolds would call patients to confirm their appointments, and at the same time inform them that the office's computers were down and that a cash payment would be appreciated. The amounts of those cash payments ranged from low-dollar insurance co-pays to payments of more than \$1,000, Wickum said.

"In May of '05 she decides to give herself a raise and starts taking cash funds. She would manipulate the front office computer to reflect that any patient that made a cash payment ... she would make the computer show that they took an umbrella insurance payment instead," Wickum said.

"In February 2006, the dentist catches her red-handed embezzling cash funds at the front office. He confronts her and at first she denied it and later admitted to it. But at that time, the dentist doesn't know the extent of the theft until they do an audit and find that she has embezzled over \$17,000 in cash," Wickum said.

He said in the small Victorville dentist office no one else was checking the computers to see what she was doing.

"I think it was becoming very complicated for her to keep up with her own manipulations of the system. I would suspect around tax time had she not been caught that ultimately the crime would have been discovered," Wickum said.

He said the complicated web of cover-ups was also what made the investigation so arduous for detectives, because they had to obtain and examine so many financial statements from various banks as well as internal audits. It was a time-consuming process, even after Wickum was alerted to the case in February.

But when Reynolds began working at a second dentist's office in Apple Valley in April, the urgency, as well as the amount of work, instantly doubled for detectives.

They served a search warrant at her home in the 13300 block of Calite Avenue in August, and recovered copies of blank checks from the dental office, Wickum said.

The next step was contacting the dentist to do an internal audit to determine whether there was any loss.

"We found out that she would ask the dentist to sign a blank check to pay office bills and she would then write the check to herself for anywhere from \$100 to \$4,000. Then she would photocopy it and write out her name and fill it in with a company they would use to get office supplies, in case anyone ever looked," Wickum said.

An estimated \$15,000 was missing, \$14,000 from seven checks Reynolds wrote to herself and roughly \$1,400 in cash from patients, authorities said.

After detectives contacted her employer, Reynolds reported for work and admitted to embezzling roughly \$10,000 and to knowingly keeping the prior investigation from her employer, knowing he would never have hired her, Wickum said.

He added that she claimed to need the money "to help her parents."

A case was submitted to Deputy District Attorney Anil Kaushal, who filed two counts of grand theft and two counts of embezzlement against Reynolds, after reviewing the case — which filled five large binders — for two days. Reynolds was arrested at her home about 1:30 p.m. Wednesday.

"The best thing any business can do is keep tabs on their business accounts and their employees on a regular basis to make sure that there are no discrepancies with their books because there is an enormous amount of identity theft and fraud cases out there," Wickum said.

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Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Thu, 2006-11-23 14:55.
 GRED! GRED! GRED! They love to spend other people's money and then use excuses. Most times it is the kids excuse and this time her Mother. Get a life lady after you serve time!!!!
 » reply







Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Thu, 2006-11-23 23:16.
 okay sure... there are other things that are happening in the High Desert... and the stupid detectives need to do something better with their time... stop working with their little bodies that are retired... this lady is innocent bitchess! get over it... the doctor is a stupid ass!!!!
 » reply

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Fri, 2006-11-24 00:47.
 How do you know that the Dr's is Asian? Are you part of her family or one of her friends? (Trying to make an excuse for her) Yeah there probably is worse things going on out here. But, why is she going to go and do that sooner or later she was going to get caught!!!!!!
 » reply

Submitted by Anonymous (not verified) on Fri, 2006-11-24 12:24.
 well, the doctor was turned in for insurance fraud and this woman had just quit because the Dr. was doing it... so hun just to get it straight i am most definitely not making excuses for her... she is innocent and if she wasn't i would want her in jail too!
 » reply

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Michael Stenerson / Staff Photographer: Detective Brett Zour, left, and Detective John Wickum escort Debra Reynolds to a patrol car after arresting her at her Victorville home. Reynolds is being charged with two counts of both grand theft and embezzlement.

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