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## News

### Garcia receives five-year sentence

By Karl Terry: PNT Managing Editor  
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A Portales woman was sentenced to five years in prison Wednesday on charges related to the embezzlement of \$139,164 from two employers, according to a news release from the 9th Judicial District Attorney's office.

Tammy Jo Garcia, 34, of Portales pleaded guilty to two counts of embezzlement, one count of fraud and 10 counts of forgery and was sentenced by Judge David Reeb of the 9th Judicial District Court in Roosevelt County. The judge ordered that, following the prison sentence, Garcia serve five years supervised parole and make full restitution during that time.

Garcia was accused of embezzling \$138,314 from an account at Eastern New Mexico University for the New Mexico Higher Education Assessment Association, by forging checks on 69 occasions from May 28, 2002, to July 6, 2004, according to court records.

According to ENMU officials, Garcia was hired in 1998 as a planning services secretary. She was promoted to senior secretary for the Assessment Resource Office in September of 2001 and resigned in July 2004.

ENMU Campus Police began investigating the crime in 2004, which led to an investigation by Portales Police Department that resulted in additional embezzlement and forgery charges connected to the disappearance of \$850 from the Roosevelt County Swine Breeders Association. Garcia was arrested by Portales Police in late February 2005 and bonded out the same day.

According to 9th Judicial District Attorney Matt Chandler, Garcia had originally been scheduled to sign a plea agreement in April but backed out at the hearing. Her trial was set for Sept. 7 at which time a plea agreement was finalized.

"At sentencing hearing she was facing two to 15 years," Chandler said.

"The law enforcement agencies investigating presented a solid case based on evidence which we believe is the reason why she entered a plea."

Chandler said that as a part of the plea bargain some of the 69 counts of forgery were dropped.

The court has instructed her to surrender herself Dec. 28 to start serving the prison sentence as

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part of the agreement, Chandler said.

In the criminal complaint, Garcia was charged with forging the signature of Larry Smith, then coordinator of ENMU's assessment department. Garcia's responsibilities in that office included reconciling monthly bank statements, making deposits, typing checks and other bookkeeping duties. She was never authorized to sign checks or withdraw money from the account, according to the affidavit.

"Our number-one goal is to make sure restitution is paid in this case and see that the defendant has some sort of sentence," Chandler said. "We believe this accomplishes that."

Chandler said he was not certain if ENMU would have been responsible for repaying the money if Garcia had not pleaded guilty. ENMU officials declined to comment on the case. Smith, who has since retired did not return phone calls by press time.

The phone at the number listed for Garcia was no longer in service when the PNT attempted to contact her.

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