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## Union worker admits embezzlement

Wednesday, December 06, 2006

**BY GUY STERLING**  
Star-Ledger Staff

A Little Egg Harbor Township woman pleaded guilty in federal court yesterday to embezzling \$40,000 from a union local that represents glassworkers at a South Jersey china factory.

Prosecutors said Marie Elena Clayton, 64, served as secretary-treasurer of Local 236A of the Glass, Molders/Plastics International Union 9 at the time she stole the money between 2002 and 2004. The local has a couple of hundred members.

At her court hearing in Newark, Clayton said she held the secretary-treasurer's job for 15 years and had worked out of a Lenox china plant in Pomona. She is no longer with the local, said V. Grady O'Malley, the assistant U.S. attorney assigned to the case.

Under questioning before U.S. District Judge Jose Linares, Clayton admitted embezzling the money with 74 checks, some of which she made out to herself from the local's two bank accounts.

But Clayton said she also wrote out checks to other union officers and forged their names to cash them. Some of the money was used to pay personal bills, authorities said.

Asked what she was supposed to do with the union's funds, Clayton replied: "I would pay the bills. I would pay the shop stewards. Whatever."

She then acknowledged she had an obligation to spend the local's funds strictly for the benefit of its members, not her personal gain.

Clayton faces up to five years in prison and fines ranging to \$250,000 when she is sentenced in March. But under federal guidelines, the actual sentence should be in the range of 12 to 18 months, authorities said.

Clayton was allowed to remain free on a \$10,000 personal recognizance bond.

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