

Markets

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Trial Ordered in Looting of Mich. County

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HARRISVILLE, Mich. — The former county treasurer in this Lake Huron vacation community was ordered to stand trial on charges that he looted \$186,500 in public funds for a Nigerian investment scam.

Thomas Katona is charged with eight counts of embezzlement, one of attempted embezzlement and two counts of forgery. He has not entered a plea.

Police have said the money went to organizations linked to a Nigerian "advance fee" scheme, variations of which have been around for years. They begin with unsolicited letters or e-mails seeking help in transferring millions of dollars from Africa to overseas accounts.

Victims are typically offered a generous share of the money if they pay upfront "costs" such as taxes, fees and bribes.

Katona is to be arraigned Monday in Alcona County Circuit Court. He would face up to 14 years in prison if convicted of the more serious embezzlement charges.

Katona's attorney, Dan White, said he had reviewed the evidence presented Wednesday and chose not to challenge it.

Katona was treasurer from 1993 until his dismissal late last year.

He pleaded guilty to two felonies in 1998 after falsifying documents for private accounting clients. Under his plea bargain, the charges were dismissed after he stayed out of trouble for a year.

He was re-elected in 2000 and 2004.



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