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Former Paola Bookkeeper Faces Civil Lawsuit for Embezzlement

By: Brian McCauley, bmccauley@miconews.com

Five months after Catherine Birkholz of Paola pleaded guilty to criminal charges of stealing more than \$264,000 from a client while working as a bookkeeper, she now faces a civil lawsuit stemming from the same theft.

Birkholz, 40, spent about seven weeks in the Miami County Jail last year after she was arrested for embezzling more than \$264,000 from Professional Pest Control, owned and operated by Pat and Kelly Rayne of Paola, over a period of seven years.

After reaching a plea agreement with Miami County Attorney David L. Miller, Birkholz was placed on probation for two years and ordered to pay back \$125,000.

The Raynes, operating as Professional Pest Control, filed a civil lawsuit last week, asking for additional restitution totaling more than \$75,000.

Their petition, filed in Miami County District Court, describes how Birkholz was working for Jerry's Tax Service of Paola in the late 1990s when the Raynes turned to the business for help with their bookkeeping.

All of the bank statements for Professional Pest Control went directly to Birkholz for review and reconciliation, according to the petition.

Court records also state that Birkholz forged checks and embezzled money from Professional Pest Control over seven years, including: more than \$16,000 in 1999, more than \$16,000 in 2000, more than \$19,000 in 2001, more than \$46,000 in 2002, more than \$58,000 in 2003, more than \$55,000 in 2004, more than \$48,000 in 2005 and more than \$2,000 in 2006.

At the same time Professional Pest Control was suffering financially, including some years in which there was not enough money to pay taxes on time, Birkholz allegedly purchased a speed boat, two personal watercrafts and a vacation home, according to the petition.

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