

Bookkeeper allegedly stole \$400,000

HALD STAFF

The bookkeeper for a Monroe labor union trust has been charged with five counts of first-degree theft for allegedly embezzling more than \$400,000 from the organization over about three years.

Dorothy L. Weber, 68, of Federal Way will be summoned to Snohomish County Superior Court for arraignment, deputy prosecutor Jim Townsend said.

She was employed as office manager and bookkeeper by the

Northwest Sheet Metal Workers Organizational Trust in Monroe from 1992 to early 2003. Townsend said in court papers that the thefts began in 2000.

Weber had complete control of the organization's checking account and bank and business records, Townsend said.

Her employment ended when the trust's executive director "discovered the defendant had been engaged in large-scale embezzlement," he said.

She is accused of making a large number of checks payable

to herself. The checks were processed by a bank even though they did not contain the required two authorized signatures, Townsend said.

A Monroe police detective contacted Weber in early 2003, showing her one of the unauthorized checks. The officer asked how much more was involved, and when the thefts started, Townsend said.

"The defendant said she did not know and offered to immediately repay \$109,000. The defendant said she expected to re-

ceive proceeds from an out-of-state lottery," Townsend said.

The executive director later received a telephone call from Weber, who apologized for her actions, the deputy prosecutor said.

An audit showed that Weber took more than \$400,000 from the trust without authorization, Townsend said.

Most of the loss resulted when Weber issued checks to herself, he said. A small amount of loss is attributed to unauthorized petty cash withdrawals, Townsend said.

Bookkeeper's lottery

habit costly

■ After serving a 14-month prison term for first-degree theft, the Federal Way woman, now 68, should have her \$549,000 restitution bill paid off in a little over 457 years.

BY JIM HALEY
Herald Writer

A Federal Way woman convicted of embezzling from a Monroe trust fund was sentenced to pay back what she stole, in \$100 monthly installments.

That means Dorothy L. Weber, 68, should be clear of her roughly \$488,000 debt (plus about \$61,000 in expenses) by early 2462.

Weber was also sentenced to 14 months in prison for embezzling from the Northwest Sheet Metal Workers Organizational Trust for more than three years.

Snohomish County Superior Court Judge Thomas Wynne on Wednesday imposed the maximum term under state law for Weber's first-degree theft convictions.

Deputy prosecutor Halley Hupp asked for the maximum

term after Weber pleaded guilty to five counts of first-degree theft.

Defense attorney Rafael Schwimmer said Weber has a mental disorder, but conceded that it wasn't serious enough to keep her from knowing that she was committing a crime.

Weber used the embezzled money to play the lottery. She kept playing in the hope that she would win and could pay back

the trust, perhaps with a little left over for herself, Schwimmer said.

Weber said she's willing to pay the consequences for her actions. She said the thefts were "out of character" for her and offered her "sincere apologies" for what she did.

Weber was the trust's office manager and bookkeeper from 1992 to 2003, when the thefts were discovered. She had complete control of the organization's checking account and bank and business records, according to court documents.

She illegally made a large number of checks payable to herself. The checks were processed by a

bank even though they didn't have the required two signatures, documents said.

Neither the trust's executor, Dwight Nelson, nor the trust's attorney, Greg Petrie, would say how much money is in the trust, which is used to promote the sheet metal industry in Washington.

The thefts didn't crimp the organization, they said.

"Obviously, it's a significant amount of money," Petrie said. "We were fortunate it was insured."

Reporter Jim Haley: 425-339-3447 or haley@heraldnet.com.

Local

HERALD THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2004

Ex-bookkeeper charged in theft of school funds

■ **A Lynnwood woman allegedly took more than \$143,000 from the Edmonds School District.**

By JIM HALEY
Herald Writer

A former Edmonds School District bookkeeper was charged Wednesday with stealing more than \$143,000 of school money over four years.

Victoria Lee Lewin, 55, of Lynnwood will be sent a summons to appear in Snohomish County Superior Court to answer first-degree theft charges, deputy prosecutor Craig Bray said.

In addition, Bray said, the charging papers contain an allegation that Lewin committed a "major economic offense," an additional factor that could earn Lewin an extra-long prison term if she is convicted.

Lewin, an accounts receivable bookkeeper employed at the district since 1990, resigned in November 2002 when her supervisor confronted her with discrepancies in district accounts, Bray said.

That led officials to become suspicious and request an audit. It found a loss of \$143,149, Bray said.

As part of her job, Lewin received cash and checks from schools and other departments within the district. She was supposed to assign funds to the proper accounts and deposit the money in a bank.

"Evidence indicates that, as far

back as 1998, the defendant began siphoning cash from the revenue transmittals for her own personal use," Bray said.

She used a complicated "lapping technique" to conceal losses, essentially using funds from one department to conceal losses in another, he said. Some departments tracked their funds closer than others, Bray added.

In her Nov. 24, 2002, letter of resignation, which was signed by her attorney, Lewin said she had a serious depression problem. Her attorney said he had been authorized to discuss discrepancies and "the appropriate repayment measures to be taken," Bray said.

Lewin later met with school officials and described how she had concealed her thefts, Bray said.

"The defendant said she did not concern herself with balancing the individual transactions at all. She just made sure the monthly balancing with the (Snohomish) County Treasurer's Office was accurate," Bray said.

Most of the time, Lewin told school officials, she just spent the money as she got it, Bray said. She added that she sometimes deposited cash in her own account.

She denied taking funds in 2002, but Bray said she made a large number of cash deposits in her own bank account that year. The deposits exceeded her pay, he added.

"This would appear to indicate that the thefts of district cash continued well into 2002," Bray said.

Reporter Jim Haley: 425-339-3447 or haley@heraldnet.com.

Embezzlement charges are filed

By SCOTT NORTH
Herald Writer

A former secretary at the fire department in Darrington was charged with five felonies Thursday for allegedly stealing more than \$16,400 in public funds.

Lelia M. Booker-Burns, 39, took care of the financial records at Snohomish County Fire District 24 from January 1999 to December 2002.

Evidence suggests Booker-Burns submitted falsified vouchers to the county and misappropriated fire district funds for her own use, Snohomish County deputy prosecutor Craig Bray said in Superior Court papers.

Booker-Burns spent \$7,000 to buy a 1990 Chevrolet Suburban in April 2002 and submitted altered records to hide the fact

that the vehicle was bought for her personal use, court papers say.

She also used public money to pay for her cellphones, bought computers for her daughter and husband's massage therapy business, and in one instance looted the fire district's petty cash fund of \$4,000, Bray said.

The misappropriation was documented by a private auditing firm and the state auditor. She admitted the misdeeds when confronted by detectives in December 2002, Bray said.

Booker-Burns now lives in southwest Montana. She is charged with four counts of first-degree theft and once count of second-degree theft.

Reporter Scott North: 425-339-3431 or north@heraldnet.com.