
Embezzler pleads guilty, sentenced to 10 years

By Amy E. Turnbull

Staff Writer

The accountant who essentially bankrupted a Wilmington restaurant earlier this year pleaded guilty to embezzlement Monday and was sentenced to about 10 years in prison.

Curtis Anthony Stamps, 43, owner of Accountable Services Corp., admitted to taking as much as \$100,000 from Vinnie's Steakhouse and Tavern on Eastwood Road.

He may have actually stolen as much as \$500,000 over three years, said John Sherrill, first assistant district attorney.

Mr. Sherrill said the restaurant's owners trusted their signature stamps to the ironically named defendant, Mr. Stamps, who used it to write checks for all the business' bills. He also used the stamp to write checks to himself, then removed the forged checks from the monthly state-

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ment so the owners wouldn't find them.

Eighty to 90 checks were missing, Mr. Sherrill said.

Mr. Stamps was caught when the owners confronted him about changing a check to himself from \$900 to \$9,000.

He was on probation from a 1995 conviction on 22 counts of embezzlement. He had been the vice president of finance and administration at Training Systems Inc., a Wilmington employee training company, when he admitted to taking \$106,000 from the business.

He was ordered to repay the money he siphoned and was put on five years' probation.

Mr. Stamps' probation was revoked after Monday's guilty plea, and his original sentences were reinstated, adding about 22 years to his sentence. He will likely serve only three to five years because the case fell under old sentencing rules that saw most offenders serve a fraction of their time.

He must serve the time on his probation violation sentences before he begins the latest sentence of more than seven years.

The sentence for embezzlement of more than \$100,000 is heavier than that for armed robbery, Mr. Sherrill explained.

"He's going to be gone for a good while," he said.

Samantha Edwards, who also prosecuted the case, said the restaurant owners told a judge in New Hanover County Superior Court that they have been deeply scarred by the case.

The restaurant went out of business.

One woman had put her life's savings into the business, along with money from her parents. Another of the restaurant's owners said it would now be difficult to put his son through college.

Mr. Sherrill said the victims spoke of losing their homes as well as dealing with tax liens and debts — both personal and business.

The victims seized all of Mr. Stamps' possessions, but it only put "a small dent" in the amount that he had stolen, Mr. Sherrill said.

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