

# SWNI office manager receives 38 month jail sentence for embezzlement

By Lee Perlman  
The Southwest Portland Post

On January 20 Judge Youlee Yim You sentenced Virginia Stromer, former Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. office manager, to 38 months of incarceration for the theft of \$131,000 from SWNI over the course of seven years.

Stromer was also sentenced to 60 months of probation after her release, and to make at least partial restitution to SWNI.

As part of the restitution, Stromer returned \$1,250 in pay and \$2,100 in unused vacation time owed to her after her abrupt resignation in October 2010, and pledged to immediately hand over another \$10,000 held in trust.

Deputy District Attorney David P. Shen had asked for 57 months of jail time, while Public Defender Damien Donnelly-Cole asked that Stromer serve "less than a year" in jail.

SWNI Executive Director Sylvia Bogert testified at the hearing on behalf of the prosecution. Stromer

gave a statement and her sister Karen Lee DeSousa, son Jarrett Stromer and friend Nicholas Carter testified on her behalf.

After an initial Not Guilty plea, Stromer pleaded guilty to all charges, and both she and her supporters conceded that Stromer's actions were wrong. However, they argued that the embezzlement was motivated by a compulsion to help others in a material way that was so strong it had become a pathology.

"There's no excuse, no justification for what she did," Donnelly-Cole said. "She knows what she did was wrong." However, he added, she suffered abuse and "loss of self-esteem" in her youth. "She never came to grips with it or learned to cope with it," he said.

According to Donnelly-Cole, "She filled the void by caring for other people. The thefts were to continue filling that void by caring for other people, shopping for them, helping them out."

"Sending her to prison won't help in dealing with the problem," said Donnelly-Cole. "She needs

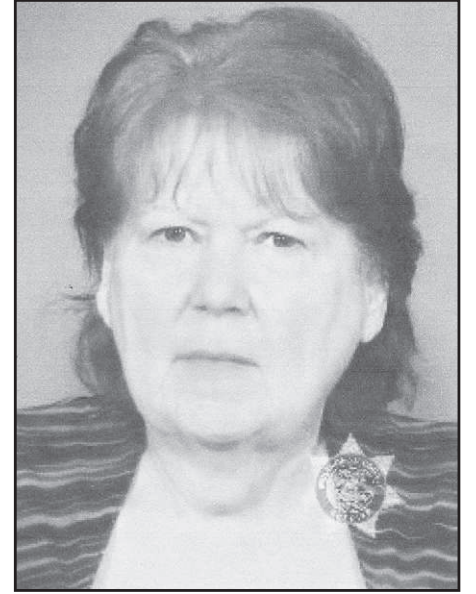
intensive therapy. I understand that there's a need for punishment, and to ensure that this doesn't happen again. The best way is probation and therapy."

Carter said that he had accompanied Stromer to the SWNI office and "northwest (sic) neighborhood functions. She seemed to be not just the go-to person for the office, the computer, the newsletter, but she always had time for people."

According to Carter, "She was really alive in that atmosphere. She misses her job and her friends. It's tearing her apart. She'd be grateful for the opportunity to correct her behavior. There are resources to deal with her problem. If she could correct the problem she could get back out there and help others."

DeSousa and Jarrett Stromer also testified to Stromer's compulsive charity.

Stromer herself could barely speak coherent sentences. "Somehow I could separate in my mind what I had done," she said. "I hate that I hurt Sylvia and caused the pain I caused."



Virginia Stromer (Multnomah County Sheriff booking photo)

Bogert gave a very different perspective. "Ginny is a very intelligent and capable person," she said. "She knows right from wrong. She understood and had knowledge of our project. She knows that volunteers often raised money dollar by dollar." (Continued on Page 7)

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