

Woman faces probation for computer crimes

Expected to pay \$50,000 in restitution

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

A woman pleaded no contest Thursday to two computer crimes after allegedly stealing more than \$50,000 from an Astoria attorney's bank account.

Evonne Nicole Hughes, 34, of Portland, originally faced 10 computer crimes charges, 10 counts of theft and 10 counts of identity theft and was scheduled for trial next week. If convicted, she faced more than 20 years in prison.

But she recently reached an agreement with the Clatsop County District Attorney's Office to serve three years of probation in exchange for the no-contest pleas.

Astoria attorney Pat Lavis, 83, met Hughes while she was waiting at a local coffee shop and convinced her to work for him at his

law office on Exchange Street as he dealt with health issues. While there, Hughes asked him for financial help to pay a car loan and other bills.

After Lavis signed checks and gave them to Hughes, she allegedly used a routing number to access his bank account. She then allegedly set up an automatic payment plan to pay electric, phone and credit-card bills. Between September 2014 and June 2015, nearly 150 payments drained \$50,656 from Lavis' bank account.

Though Lavis told police he never gave her permission to use the account, Hughes said at the time that she was given blank checks. She was indicted in March 2016 and previously indicated she would like to take her case to trial. Multiple continuance motions prolonged the case until the probation agreement was finalized.

Hughes is scheduled to be sentenced in early September and will be required to pay \$50,656 in restitution. If she does not pay, the deal will be withdrawn.

'Social investment' ready to gamble on expanded preschool education

Public schools, investors could see returns

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — A new program could bring private sector funding for preschool education in Clatsop County.

County Manager Cameron Moore and Sydney Van Dusen, coordinator of Way to Wellville, came to Seaside's Downtown Development Association meeting Thursday with plans for supplementing public funds with private investment to help provide preschool for children who otherwise could not afford it.

Clatsop County is one of five communities around the country to participate in the Way to Wellville program, which came to the county in 2014.

Moore, who serves on the group's economic development committee, said the team considered lack of preschool in the county a significant impediment to economic development.

"If you have children but you don't have a place for



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian
County Manager Cameron Moore speaks to members of the Seaside Downtown Development Association.

those children to go while you go to work, you may not be working," Moore said.

Employers want to know their employees' families are taken care of, so having high-quality preschool in the county has economic impacts, Moore said.

Long-term return

In December, the county was approved for \$350,000 in federal grant money from the U.S. Department of Education, he said, money which did not require local matching funds.

"Since then we've been doing a lot of work to see if we could in some way provide additional preschool opportunities for 600 children in our county," Moore said.

That number captures some, if not all, of the children who don't have access to those services, Moore said.

One option is to "pay for success," he said, through a social investment concept. "How do you get the private sector to pay for things the public sector typically pays for?" Moore asked. "There are private investors willing to invest in these types of investments. Why not tap into that?"

Programs in other counties have addressed issues like homelessness and veterans' services, Moore said. The initial money is private, but the private investor is paid through public dollars.

Moore said the funding could reduce the number of children who need special education when they get to the K-12 system, or prepare young children so they are better academically. Returns come over the long term.

"We go to the private sector and say, 'Would you pay for this?' If they say 'yes,' and they invest, they make some

money — typically 5 percent," Moore said. "If we don't achieve the outcome — they lose their money. If they put up the money and we achieve these outcomes, we get what we want and you get a return on investment."

Families benefit

Children could receive free universal preschool if they qualify, Van Dusen added. "It would be for those families who cannot afford preschool at this time," she said.

Families at 300 percent of poverty level would be available to participate in the preschool program. Since income of \$24,000 for a family of four is considered poverty level, a family with an income of up to \$70,000 could be eligible, Van Dusen said.

Funds would "bring everybody up to a higher standard," Moore said, working with existing local preschools to provide greater access for county children, kindergarten readiness and teacher training, among other goals.

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