

Caregiver accused of stealing patient's money over a period of years

By **BEN MITCHELL**
News staff writer

A Hood River caregiver is facing multiple felony and misdemeanor charges after allegedly stealing well over \$10,000 from a female patient of hers over a period of three years.

Kati Rai Laney, 44, was indicted in Hood River County Circuit Court last week on 13 charges, nine of which are felonies, including four counts of theft in the first degree, four counts of criminal mistreatment in the first degree, and one count of aggravated theft in the first degree. She is also facing four counts of misapplication of entrusted property, a misdemeanor.

According to testimony given by Deputy District Attorney Carrie Rasmussen,



Kati Rai Laney

Laney was originally hired as an in-home caregiver for the victim more than 10 years ago, but was fired by "the victim, with the assistance of DHS (Department of Human Services) in January of last year."

Rasmussen did not offer

exact details in court as to how the alleged thefts occurred, but made mention of issues with credit cards.

"The victimized (is) a very vulnerable person; the victim is a quadriplegic. She can't even move anything now but her mouth, but she is mentally aware and she is very certain she did not authorize Kati Laney to take out these multiple credit cards," she said. "We're still conducting ongoing investigations with numerous bank accounts. We're still getting records; this investigation has been going on for a year."

Rasmussen added that although charges only detail alleged thefts that occurred from 2011 to 2014, "the conduct so far, in relationship to the victim, stretches back at least 10 years, but because of

the statute of limitations, there are some things that we are never going to be able to reach back and get."

Although they weren't included in the list of charges, Rasmussen noted that she was looking into additional charges regarding changes to the victim's life insurance policies allegedly made by Laney.

"One of the things that is quite alarming to me that I think speaks to a potential danger to the victim is three very large life insurance policies that in recent years — and this could be an identity theft case we're looking at — were all converted to make Kati Laney the beneficiary," she explained. Rasmussen noted that "it always sends up red flags when we see one insurance policy after another on someone's life when their health is declining, cutting out their families, to the benefit of a caregiver."

Rasmussen stated that she believed these were policies that the victim "never could have signed because she can't move her hand." She added that the Veterans Af-

fairs Office had been made aware of the case.

It was mentioned that Laney is currently employed at a caregiving facility, but the name of the facility was not given in court. According to a Facebook page for Laney, she has been employed as a "CNA" or "certified nurse's assistant" at Providence Brookside Manor in Hood River 2006.

Susan Frost, public affairs manager for Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital, confirmed that Laney had been an employee of Brookside Manor and was still employed as of Tuesday morning. She would not comment on whether there would be any sort of disciplinary action levied against Laney and would not comment further on the alleged incident due to the "ongoing investigation."

Bail for Laney was originally set at \$15,000, then raised to \$30,000 by Judge John A. Olson per Rasmussen's request. Bail was dropped to \$4,000 during a subsequent court appearance after a request was made by Laney's attorney,

Conor Sullivan. He argued that bail should be reduced as his client had "no criminal history, no traffic history, and I don't believe even any parking tickets." He said Laney was a "life-long resident of Hood River" with a husband and three children as well as being a "4-H leader" and involved with her daughter's softball team. Sullivan also noted that Laney had been a CNA since the age of 18.

Laney bailed out of the Northern Oregon Regional Correctional Facility on Friday, with conditions of her release including no contact with the elderly or disabled in a caregiving capacity and no possession of any debit or credit cards that are not in her name.

Rasmussen's office was contacted for more information on the case, but Rasmussen did not respond by press time.

The next court appearance for Laney is set for March 30th. The most serious of the charges levied against Laney could result in up to a 10-year prison sentence.

GORGE

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In 2014 the University of Washington and Portland State University did an administrative assessment of the Gorge Commission at the behest of governors and the Washington Office of Financial Management. The study said that the Gorge Commission had only 25 percent of the resources needed to do its job. Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber (who resigns effective Feb. 18) responded by increasing the commission's budget by 89 percent, but Washington Gov. Jay Inslee committed to only a 7 percent increase in his proposed budget.

Kitzhaber's budget bumped Oregon's \$891,000 share of the bi-state agency's budget up to over \$1.6 million. Nichols noted it was "a step in the right direction," but was "still only half of what we need." "One of the biggest challenges and has been, building relationships and trying to get the two states to work together and make the sufficient investment in the commission and its role in the Scenic Area, and it is certainly a challenge," Nichols said Monday.

Nichols said the Gorge Commission needs \$2 million a year from each state for the commission to do its work, and help the region prepare for long-term protection of the Gorge resources and enhancement of a vibrant and sustainable economy. "I think it's a reasonable investment," he said. By law, the funding from each state must be equal, even if that means accepting less than is offered from the State of Oregon.

"Unfortunately the gover-

nor (Inslee) was not in a position to respond to those reports, and that will continue to be a challenge of the commission to move forward," Nichols said.

In January Sen. John Huffman of The Dalles and a Washington counterpart announced that they would jointly propose legislation in Salem and Olympia to set up a bi-state task force to advise on future funding of the Gorge Commission.

Asked about the timing of his resignation given: the funding situation and the pending task force legislation, Nichols said, "it's just coincidental. I've been working with the Ruckelshaus Center and for the last three years, and the Ruckelshaus Center has been working on the assistant director position for a couple of years and I initially expressed interest in it several months ago before we knew the outcome of the budget discussions."

"I sincerely hope the states are able to come together in terms of their agreement to the compact and help that compact work for an agency that is absolutely vital."

Nichols described his work with the Commission and its staff as a unique privilege, saying "I am very proud of what we've accomplished over the last three years and I am confident in our staff and leadership's ability to work collaboratively with Gorge communities, agency partners, Columbia River Treaty tribes, the states, local industry and the public."

"The Northwest faces many complex and growing challenges. The Columbia River Gorge is more than any one person's or organization's vision — it takes all of us working together to protect the Gorge and prepare our communities for the fu-

ture" said Nichols, who holds a degree in Economics and a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning. Nichols plans to spend some time with his family and wrapping up work on a law degree in environmental and natural resources during the transition. He will remain available as needed while the Commission selects a replacement.

Chamberlain said Nichols has helped the Commission work better together internally and reached out to external partners. He and a five-member staff have stabilized basic funding for the agency, solved some longstanding disputes, strengthened regional relations, addressed recreation and transportation concerns, and entered a first-ever agreement with Klickitat County.

The Commission remains focused on working well together and with the Gorge community. In recent years, the Commission has increased capacity for collaborative regional planning and bi-state partnership. The Commission is on a path to fill its role as a visionary regional planning agency. That role became clear in the Commission's recent work with Northwest universities, through an assessment that established for the first time what it will take to protect and enhance a truly National Scenic Area and support a vibrant, sustainable regional economy.

Before coming to the Gorge Commission Nichols has served for six years as the Community Services Division manager for the Department of Land Conservation and Development, overseeing a staff of 14 in seven regional offices and helping local governments implement Oregon's statewide planning program.

Small Business Showcase March 13

Small Business Showcase returns March 13 to a new location — Butler Bank Building, 301 Oak St.

Businesses interested in renting a booth at the event (\$100 fee) may register at the Hood River Chamber of Commerce website, hoodriver.org.

At Small Business Showcase, attendees of the free event meet business owners and employees and learn about goods and services available in the Gorge.

Steffen Lunding and Claudia Lane of Red Tail Holdings had renovated the building and operated it as 301 Gallery in 2012-13.

The building was last used for the Holiday Pop-Up market in November-December 2014.

The showcase will be the first public event at Butler Bank Building since Stephanie Laur and Union Event Co. assumed management in January. The company (unioneventco.com) provides event planning at Butler Bank as well as custom locations.

Butler Bank Building, in the 1927 building that formerly served as city hall until 2010, is available for rent for parties, receptions, dinners, and other events.



THE BUTLER BANK building will host the Small Business Showcase, which returns Friday, March 13.

CHARGE

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in April 2014 — 10 months before his actual arrest this week. The indictment contains little information about the crime, other than the name of the victim and the date of the incident.

English said deputies Kyle Cozad and Jesse Flem took a

commercial flight down to the San Francisco Airport and picked up Nichols on Thursday, who was previously housed at the San Mateo County Jail. English declined to provide details on how law enforcement officers in California were able to find Nichols.

Hood River County Deputy District Attorney Carrie Rasmussen's office was contacted for additional information, but Rasmussen was

not able to be reached directly.

Nichols was arraigned at the Hood River County Courthouse late Friday morning, but no additional information was provided.

He is currently on a no-bail hold and faces a minimum sentence of 25 years in prison, with a maximum sentence of life. Nichols is next scheduled to appear March 3 at 11 a.m.

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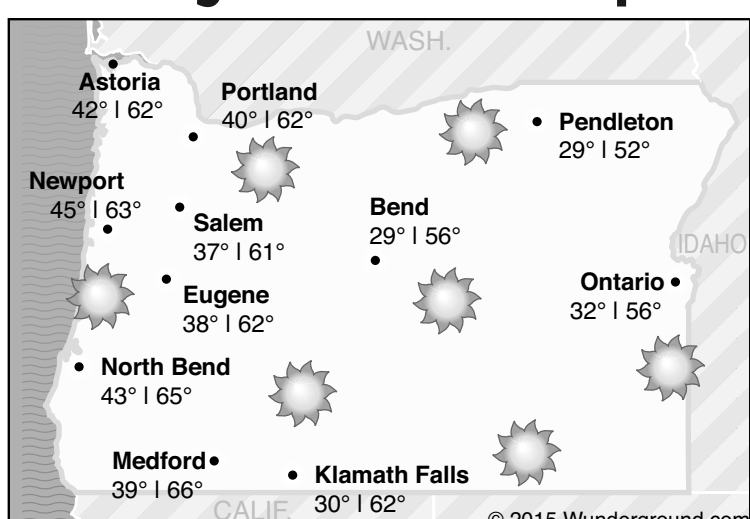
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Hood River Weather Forecast

Date	Forecast	Daytime / Overnight High / Low (°F)
Today Feb 18	Partly Cloudy	58° / 43°
Thurs. Feb 19	Partly Cloudy	58° / 41°
Fri. Feb 20	Partly Cloudy	56° / 38°
Sat. Feb 21	Sunny	57° / 38°
Sun. Feb 22	Sunny	55° / 36°
Mon. Feb 23	Sunny	56° / 36°
Tues. Feb 24	Sunny	57° / 39°

Oregon Weather Map



Humidity 99%

Wind Speed SW 1 G 3 MPH

Barometer NA

Dewpoint 30°F (-1°C)

Visibility NA

Last Update on 16 Feb 8:00 am PST

Actual High / Low

AGRIMET HOOD RIVER OR
Lat: 45.6842 Long: -121.5181 Elev: 510
http://uspest.org

Feb 9	-	48/43
Feb 10	-	57/43
Feb 11	-	54/36
Feb 12	-	60/37
Feb 13	-	56/34
Feb 14	-	61/42
Feb 15	-	59/33

Today's Forecast
Mostly sunny, with a high near 57. Calm wind becoming west 5 to 7 mph in the morning.

Updated Monday, Feb. 16 at 9:00 a.m. PST
Data from www.weather.com

WINTER CHECKLIST

TRACTION TIRES


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SIPING



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