

Ex-land trust director charged with theft

He's accused of spending group's money on travel, health products

By Pamela Powers
Menomonie News Bureau

MENOMONIE — The former executive director of the West Wisconsin Land Trust was charged Tuesday with felony theft of \$26,800 in connection with the inappropriate use of a corporate credit card from January 2007 to July 2010.

Richard E. Gauger, 53, of Knapp was in Dunn County Court on the felony charge of being party to the crime of theft

through false representation. If convicted, he faces up to a \$25,000 fine and 10 years in prison.

Judge Bill Stewart released Gauger on a \$5,000 signature bond. He is scheduled to return to court April 19.

According to the criminal complaint:

West Wisconsin Land Trust interim executive director Jane Prohaska contacted Menomonie police in September, two months after Gauger was

fired by the organization. One of the reasons for Gauger's firing was the organization had come under scrutiny from the federal government for misappropriation or misuse of federal grants, Prohaska said. Gauger was executive director for 10 years.

Gauger had broad authority to approve spending for the organization without the need for additional approval or



Gauger

review.

After Gauger was fired, no credit card statements from the past few years could be found in the land trust office. After duplicate statements were obtained from a credit card company, Prohaska said, there were many charges made by Gauger that were inappropriate and were subsequently approved by former associate director Edith Kadlec and paid from land trust funds.

One spreadsheet showed \$66,466 in charges to the organization from Gauger that are believed to be unrelated to the business.

In a second spreadsheet, Gauger made notes defending some of the credit card charges; a third spreadsheet had charges Gauger was not able to defend as legitimate business expenses. The third spreadsheet showed charges of \$26,814, including eight charges totaling nearly \$450 made in the four days after Gauger was fired from the land trust.

In September, when Gauger met with the president of the land trust board of directors and an attorney trying to negotiate a separation settlement, Gauger admitted to

making at least \$21,000 in inappropriate credit card purchases. When asked why he did it, Gauger replied, "Because I could."

Every month the corporate credit card assigned to Gauger showed purchases for numerous nutritional supplements and male enhancement products averaging in the hundreds of dollars per month. In December 2009 he charged more than \$1,000 in essential oils.

Gauger said the health products and nutritional supplement purchases were to combat "burnout"

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CHIPPEWA FALLS

City plowing policy to be made official

Two inches of snow would be enough to send trucks

By Chris Vetter
Chippewa Falls News Bureau

CHIPPEWA FALLS — Chippewa Falls has never had an official snow removal policy, but that is about to change.

The City Council Tuesday approved a rough draft of the new policy, which is being sent to Board of Public Works to review on Feb. 21. If that board approves the policy, it could come back to the City Council for final approval in March.

City engineer Rick Rubenzer, who has assumed many of the street superintendent duties in the past few months, said it made sense to have the policy — which has been used for years by the Street Department — approved by the council.

"We're not out to change the existing policy," Rubenzer told the council Tuesday. "We wanted to get it in writing and be as consistent as we can. We're using the

policy that's been in place for years."

One notable change to the existing policy states that snow removal crews would head out once 2 inches of accumulation are on the roads. The present policy says snow removal begins with 3 inches of snowfall.

"If we get two or three 1-inch snows, we'll go out and plow," Rubenzer said.

Rubenzer said he's received a lot of feedback in recent weeks, and people are telling him they like how well the streets in the city are maintained. He said there are more than 100 miles of streets within the city limits.

Mayor Greg Hoffman asked the public to continue to share their thoughts over the next month as Rubenzer keeps working on drafting the final policy.

"It's good to have a lot of discussion on this," Hoffman said.

In 2009, citing budget issues, Eau Claire approved a police under which city crews do not plow residential streets unless at least 3 inches of snow falls, although the city maintains 86 miles of primary streets under a "bare pavement" policy. The decision has caused controversy.

Liquor license transfer

The council tabled transferring a liquor license for Dewey's Roadhouse, 1 E. Canal St., from

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Rubenzer



Bette Wahl, 70, is retiring this month after nearly 17 years as project coordinator with the Eau Claire Coalition for Youth. The coalition, part of the Eau Claire Police Department, works with local nonprofit groups, city and county departments and other agencies to help prevent youth crime.

Staff photo by Andi Stempniak

Better kids, better city

Wahl retiring after 17 years of youth crime prevention

By McLean Bennett
Leader-Telegram staff

By most standards, Bette Wahl's retirement as project coordinator for the Eau Claire Coalition for Youth is a few years late. But there's a good reason for that.

"I love my job," said Wahl, 70, who later this month will end a nearly 17-year run as coordinator for the task force aimed at reducing youth crime. The city hired her in April 1994 to help run the program; she'll retire Feb. 25.

The number of juvenile arrests in 2009 was fewer than in any of the previous five years, Eau Claire police Lt. Chad Hoyord said. He said the efforts of the Coalition for Youth are "part of the pie" of agencies and initiatives working to reduce youth crime.

"I love my job."

— Bette Wahl, 70, project coordinator, Eau Claire Coalition for Youth

The Eau Claire Coalition for Youth was started in 1992 by then-City Manager Don Norrell. The organization, part of the Eau Claire Police Department, meets frequently with local nonprofit groups — including the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club of the Greater Chippewa Valley — and city and county departments to share ideas for reducing crime. It also works with groups such as the state Department of Public Instruction and the Eau Claire

school district.

The organization focuses on preventing substance, alcohol and child abuse, violence and bullying. It launched efforts to get kids involved in after-school activities, started volunteer programs at schools and worked with local businesses to hire teenagers.

"That was huge, to get businesses to step forward to hire kids," Wahl said of the youth employment program, which went by the title Youth Works. The program no longer exists.

Wahl also helped launch the annual National Night Out program in Eau Claire in the mid-1990s. The event's goals are to raise awareness about crime and

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Staff photo by Steve Kinderman

Things in abundance: Snow and Packers spirit

A large snowbank in the 3400 block of Gerrard Avenue, on Eau Claire's southwest side, was decorated Tuesday in support of the Green Bay Packers, who play the Pittsburgh Steelers Sunday in Super Bowl XLV in Arlington, Texas.

Standoff suspect's competency questioned

By Dan Holtz
Leader-Telegram staff

A competency evaluation has been ordered for the Eau Claire man accused of engaging police in a seven-hour standoff while armed with a rifle.

The evaluation for Barry P. Shewczyk was ordered recently by Eau Claire County Judge William Gabler after both Gabler and defense attorney David Rice of Eau Claire expressed concerns about Shewczyk's competency to assist with his defense.

Judge Benjamin Proctor will rule on Shewczyk's competency at a Feb. 16 hearing.

Shewczyk, 29, 620 Deyo Ave., is charged with a felony count of failing to comply with an officer's attempt to take a person into custody and misdemeanor counts of negligent handling of a weapon, disorderly conduct, possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia.



Shewczyk

Eau Claire police responded at 9:45 p.m. Jan. 12 to a two-story duplex at 1907 Hoover Ave. after a woman called said Shewczyk held a rifle and threatened to kill police and others.

According to police and the criminal complaint:

The woman fled the second story of the duplex before authorities arrived.

Police responded and located Shewczyk, who continued to go in and out of the residence with a rifle.

Seventeen members of the Police Department's tactical team were called in along with 10 members of the Eau Claire County Sheriff's Department's tactical team.

Police requested assistance from the Sheriff's Department so tactical personnel could take rotating shifts in the cold weather.

The resident in the first floor of the duplex was evacuated, but neighboring residences were not.

Shewczyk surrendered at about 5 a.m. Jan. 13, after authorities shot a gas

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