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Edmond's Owens indicted on embezzlement charges

By TRACI CHAPMAN | SPECIAL TO THE SUN Jul 27, 2015



Traci Lorre Owens, 46, of Edmond

An Edmond woman has been indicted on federal embezzlement charges related to a Canadian County nonprofit agency.

Traci Lorre Owens, 46, was charged after a federal grand jury determined she allegedly used funds from Canadian County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) “by making and depositing checks payable to herself and to cash for reimbursement of unauthorized expenses and duplicate payroll checks,” federal officials said.

Owens on Friday plead not guilty to the charges, according to PACER, the federal court document system.

According to the indictment, Owens was first appointed as CASA’s interim executive director in November 2010 and then served as the organization’s executive director until July 2013. Because CASA received at least \$10,000 in federal funds annually, the U.S. Department of Justice was able to pursue federal charges against the Edmond woman.

The federal indictment is the result of a joint investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Inspector General and Canadian County Sheriff’s office. It was that department that first broke the case, when in April 2014 investigators there arrested Owens on 72 complaints of embezzlement and fraud, involving more than \$70,000 allegedly taken from the child assistance agency.

At that time, Canadian County Undersheriff Chris West said investigators believed the alleged thefts may have gone back to September 2011, although discrepancies weren’t discovered until November 2013. Owens resigned from CASA in September 2013.

State prosecutors never filed charges in the Canadian County case, which on the surface remained stagnant until the July 24 indictment was unsealed.

If convicted, Owens could face up to 10 years in prison, a maximum fine of \$250,000 and restitution, which includes \$70,000 in forfeiture, officials said. That would mean Owens’ assets could be seized and sold by the government to repay the funds allegedly taken from

CASA, should Owens be found guilty.

CASA is a nonprofit organization comprised of volunteers who are appointed by judges to advocate for abused and neglected children.

“Volunteer advocates — empowered directly by the courts — offer judges the critical information they need to ensure that each child’s rights and needs are being attended to while in foster care,” is stated as CASA’s mission on its national website.

“For many abused children, their CASA volunteer will be the one constant adult presence in their lives,” West said. “A large portion of the funding that supports CASA is generated by local donations and benevolent organizations such as the United Way.”

Assistant U.S. Attorneys K. McKenzie Anderson and Scott E. Williams would prosecute the case, officials said. Owens’ trial was set for Sept. 8 before federal Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange.

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