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Witmer pleads guilty in PSH theft

*Elin Marcel
Capital Times Staff*

A former manager of facilities and maintenance operations at Penn State Harrisburg has pleaded guilty to stealing \$36,613 in tools and building materials from the university.

Kenneth E. Witmer, 42, was sentenced to a \$1000 fine, \$20,854 in restitution to Penn State, two years probation and community service.

Dauphin County Chief District Attorney William T. Tully told the Patriot-News his office agreed to stand silent at the sentencing and to merge 14 counts of theft by deception into one count in exchange for Witmer's plea.

In addition to restitution, court papers say Witmer has returned approximately \$14,000 in tools and unused materials to Penn State.

According to court papers, Witmer used

purchase orders to buy \$1519 in clothing and gifts from the Penn State Harrisburg Bookstore, and materials from local merchants, including a lawnmower, a ladder, building and roofing materials, tools, and a \$138 Redspire pear tree.

Witmer used some of the materials to put an addition on his Elizabethtown residence, improve his summer home in Rehoboth Beach, Del., and build a home on Chestnut Road in Conewago Twp., which he and his brother later sold for \$98,200, court papers also say.

James D. South II, associate provost for administrative operations, said the university scrutinized purchasing procedures following the theft. Officials found it was possible for someone to make a purchase and approve payment of the bill.

To prevent the problem from happening again, South said the university has reduced the number of standing

purchase orders, reduced and restricted the number of people authorized to deal with standing purchase order vendors, and will pay closer attention to matching purchase orders with a particular activity.

Edward Dankanich, Witmer's successor, said "It's highly unlikely that this type of action could happen again, based on all these checks and balances."

South agreed, but added, "Systems are fallible. If someone wants to cheat, eventually someone will figure out a way to do that."

According to court papers, the problem surfaced in October 1990. One of Witmer's staff, Work Management Coordinator Jay Michael Ray, said he noticed irregularities while matching purchase orders with paid invoices.

South said the theft was discovered in December 1990, but declined to discuss

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Kenneth E. Witmer

PSH students ired by library inadequacies

*Karen M. Putt
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Calling the library a "second-class facility which does not reflect a fair return on the student dollar," a group of students known as the Students For a Quality Library (SFQL) is waging a war on the problems with Penn State Harrisburg's Heindel Library.

The group organized following an open forum on Nov. 2, during which students and faculty discussed the many problems with the library. The forum, and a second one held on Nov. 21 by campus administration, came following Patriot-News coverage of the library's inadequacies. After identifying problem areas at the first forum, the group drafted a petition, which about 400 students signed during last Monday's "block walk" through the dorms and Meade Heights.

Stating in their petition that they "no longer accept administration's continued neglect of the Heindel Library," the group is seeking immediate improvements in problem areas. Major issues include replacing the manual check-out system with an automated one; the purchase of an additional copy machine; replacing or repairing damaged tables, torn carpet and worn or peeling paint; and purging outdated material to make room for new material.

"Our issue is really directed at the administration," said Douglas Manger, a graduate student in American Studies and a member of the student organization. "We want them [administration] to understand very clearly where our values lie. And that is a good, sound library."

Manger said there are some "severe problems in the facility that have been

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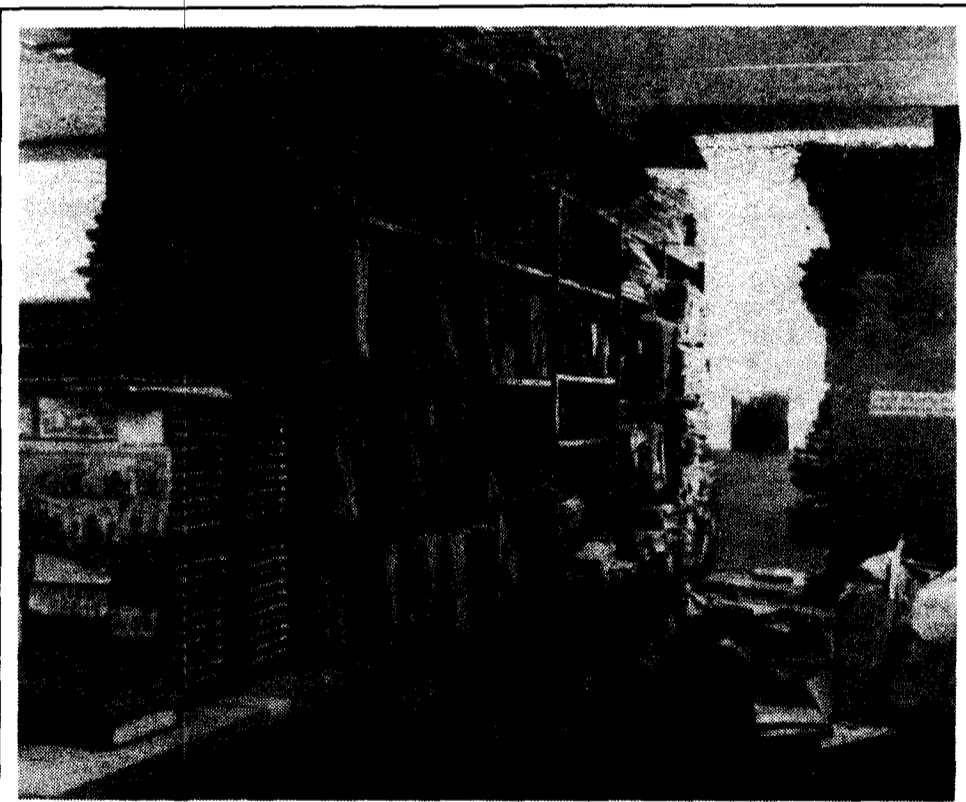


Photo by T.J. Brightman

The overcrowded periodical desk of the Heindel Library is one of the many areas in the library that is running out of space for new materials.

University keeps mum on funding

*Lee Ashton
Capital Times Staff*

State auditors currently scrutinizing how public funds are spent at the University of Pittsburgh aren't being invited to do the same at Penn State, according to University Park spokesman Bill Mahon.

Pitt recently opened its books for review at the request of Pennsylvania Auditor General Barbara Hafer, who has called for new legislation requiring the state's public universities to fully disclose

how public monies are allocated.

A sampling of students and professors at Penn State Harrisburg seems to indicate support for part of Hafer's plan, as long as personal issues such as staff salaries remain a private matter.

"I don't think they should make public the professors salaries," said Mike Rineer, a senior communications major. "On the other hand, I'd like to know what Penn State does with other funds. I think the community has a right to know how public funds are being spent."

Harris Imadojemu, assistant professor

of mechanical engineering, said, "My salary is my own business. I'm not aware of what everyone else is being paid--it's a personal thing." He also said it is the university's business on how money is spent. "Look at the library, the state should have provided money to upgrade or build a new facility here a long time ago."

Hafer testified before the Senate Education Committee in Harrisburg on Sept. 18, when she was invited to offer input on House Bill 1075, an amendment to the Right-to-Know law. Her action

came in the wake of press reports questioning spending practices at Pitt. Among other disclosures was a story about outgoing Pitt President Wesley Posvar being offered a \$201,000 annual pension.

But Bill Mahon, Penn State's director of public information, maintains "we are extremely well managed fiscally." He said the university's position is that an investigation shouldn't be conducted at our campuses just because Pitt expenditures

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