

PAYING BACK ROSLYN

Roslyn embezzlers now painted into costly corner.

BY EDEN LAIKINAND AND KARLASCHUSTER.
STAFF WRITERS

In one painting, a full moon lights up the sky while a tall ship pushes through choppy, turquoise waves. In another, a bronze ring creates a portal view of two bright blue dolphins swimming past each other.

The artwork once belonged to former Roslyn school business official Pamela Gluckin, who admits she spent district money to buy them. Now, it's in the possession of the civil forfeiture unit of the Nassau district attorney's office, which auctions the assets of people guilty of crimes and returns the revenue to the victims — in this case, the Roslyn schools.

When Gluckin and her niece, former school business clerk Debra Rigano, were first charged in the \$11.2 million theft from Roslyn, they got Nassau Assistant District Attorney Robert Nigro's standard speech.

"I am not your friend," Nigro, chief of the office's forfeiture section, said he told them, "but think of me like a credit counselor."

Of course, the six people charged so far in the Roslyn case did not always use their ill-gotten gains to buy goods that can now be returned or sold. "A lot of the money has been spent," Nigro said. "It's gone to pay bills, credit cards."

Still, the accused Roslyn embezzlers bought a lot of expensive items that can be seized. Rigano, who pleaded guilty yesterday to stealing \$780,000, has so far forfeited a pair of 1-karat diamond earrings and an 18-karat gold Rolex watch band that she admits buying with district funds. Those will also be auctioned off to repay the district.

A 1985 state law gives Nigro, a lawyer and former judge's law secretary, the authority to seize people's assets by filing civil suits against them. In cases with no victims, a percentage goes back to the district attorney's office to maintain the unit and a percentage goes to drug and alcohol rehabilitation and police agencies. Last year alone, the office disbursed \$857,787 to crime victims, various state and local agencies and the DA's office.

In this case, all proceeds — an expected \$7 million — will go to the Roslyn school district.

Since Gluckin, Rigano and former superintendent Frank Tassone were arrested last year in the Roslyn case, members of Nigro's unit have been working with Farrell Fritz, a Uniondale law firm hired by the district, to freeze and sell off assets belonging to the former officials. They will also team up to liquidate the guilty parties' bank accounts and insurance policies.

Together, they oversaw the \$1.1 million sale of Gluckin's waterfront Bellmore home, where prosecutors say mortgage payments were made with district money. The sale last month netted \$319,000 for the district. They also handled the sale of a Gluckin house in West Islip, selling it for \$1.3 million and netting \$322,000 for the district after brokers' fees and unpaid taxes. Two personal watercraft belonging to Gluckin brought in \$5,100, and her 18-foot boat is being sold.

Gluckin paid more than \$44,000 for the 13 paintings — including the one depicting the dolphins — at Gallery Lassen in Maui in 1998 and 2000, receipts show, shipping at least two of them to herself at the school district.

She surrendered them last week, carting them herself to Mineola in a pick-up truck.

The original painting and 12 numbered prints that Gluckin bought in Hawaii each cost between \$1,025 and \$10,000, according to receipts from the gallery.

In addition, more than \$1 million from various bank accounts and properties in Gluckin and her husband's names have been frozen since May 2004. And when Gluckin goes to jail, half of her \$3,650-a-month-pension will go back to the restitution fund.

Recouping the criminal proceeds in the case hasn't been easy for the district attorney's office and Farrell Fritz, the law firm. For one thing, assets are sometimes held jointly in the names of other, non-criminally charged spouses. In the case of one of the Gluckin homes seized and sold, a small percentage of the proceeds went to her husband, who had put money into it over the years.

Farrell Fritz has more leeway than the district attorney's office, however. For example, they have sued those who cost the district money by doing a poor job, such as auditors, former board members and district lawyers.

They plan to file more lawsuits and arrange the sale of more property and merchandise. They've already settled with the district's former auditing firm, Miller Lilly & Pearce, for \$925,000.

"We use different tactics," said Nigro. "But we're both working toward the same goal."

Note: May not be reproduced or retransmitted without permission. For permission call TMS Reprints at (800) 661-2511.

The sale of this reprint does not constitute or imply the publisher's endorsement of any product, service, company, individual or organization.