

Convicted thief asks judge for longer jail term

Nova Scotia woman wanted two-year federal sentence to access rehabilitation programs to treat VLT gambling addiction

TRURO, N.S.

A Nova Scotia woman who is addicted to gambling on video-lottery terminals has been sentenced to two years in jail for stealing from her employers.

Court heard that Debbie Rushton stole more than \$230,000 from T. A. Orthodontics and Donford Enter-

prises of Truro, N.S.

The 45-year-old woman from nearby Debert, N.S., pleaded guilty to theft and fraud charges in January.

During her sentencing hearing yesterday, the Crown and the defence detailed Ms. Rushton's addiction to VLTs.

Ms. Rushton stole the money

over a seven-year period to obtain money for her gambling habit, court was told.

Judge John MacDougall initially imposed an 18-month sentence in a provincial jail.

But he increased the sentence at Ms. Rushton's request because she wants to get access to rehabilitation services available at federal prisons.

Evidence presented to the court stated the woman was working overtime when she made many of her thefts.

Ms. Rushton stayed late many nights at the orthodontist's office

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DEFENCE LAWYER JILL NETTE

manipulating the books so the doctor wouldn't know she was stealing from him.

Judge MacDougall heard in provincial court that Donald Johnston noticed she was working late and

decided to pay her an extra half-hour per day. "A nice little bump up, given she was using the extra time to steal from her employer," the judge said.

Nearly \$220,000 was taken in more than 700 transactions, and it cost nearly \$20,000 for a forensic audit to uncover the theft from T. A. Orthodontics.

A further \$11,641 was taken from the associated company, Donford Enterprises Ltd., and it took another \$3,500 in audit costs to uncover that theft.

Ms. Rushton secured a loan from her mother and paid \$40,000 in res-

titution.

Defence lawyer Jill Nette told the court that Ms. Rushton had done extensive research and knew that there were more programs available in federal prison for her gambling addiction than she could find in a provincial institution.

Ms. Nette argued that Ms. Rushton used the money to feed an uncontrollable VLT addiction.

"All the money she had went to gambling," Ms. Nette said.

"It was not uncommon for her to gamble \$1,000 per week."

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