

Ex-River Bluff official charged

► **Embezzle** from Page 5A

accounts.

Hecker is accused of concealing her work by making multiple bank transfers and by keeping the uncashed checks in the vault.

Keeping so many checks uncashed lets the bookkeeper foster a system in which accounting is "a mess" so small amounts of missing money are harder to notice, Logli said.

"In any embezzlement case, the scheme will only hold up so long. Eventually it becomes uncovered. There comes a point where you're robbing Peter to pay Paul and paying last month's check with this month's revenue. It eventually catches up with the person," Logli said.

So why did it take the county 10 years to identify the missing money?

"She was taking small amounts at a time, so there was no significant discrepancies to be found," County Auditor Tom Ross said. "She did a reasonably good job of trying to conceal this."

Furthermore, River Bluff had no check-and-balance system over what Hecker did with cash.

In response, the facility has

two employees keeping written accounts of each cash expenditure. The county also has deployed a human-resources employee to the home, and Deputy County Administrator Tom Hawes will watch business operations.

"Because it was handled so sloppily, we weren't getting the job done," County Board Chairman Scott Christiansen said. "That's what set me off when I heard those (\$552,990 worth of) checks were there. I said, 'My God, what are we running out there?' Somebody's got to know what's going on."

Christiansen said he is not considering action against Phyllis Schwebke, the facility administrator.

The chairman also said he still "wants to see the whole thing unfold. Obviously, this stuff just broke today. But from what I can see, (Schwebke) has been working diligently to solve it."

Schwebke, whose salary was frozen last month when other appointed officials received raises, said she understands that an incident such as this "certainly shakes people's trust. Any time anything like this happens."

"As soon as this came to light,



Eddy Montville/Rockford Register Star

Winnebago County Auditor Tom Ross (right) speaks at a news conference Wednesday at the Winnebago County Administration Building in Rockford announcing the arrest of Diane Hecker, who is charged with the theft of more than \$172,000 in the past 10 years from River Bluff Nursing Home. Listening are Winnebago County State's Attorney Paul Logli (left) and Winnebago County Board Chairman Scott Christiansen.

we tried to take action as quickly as possible," Schwebke said.

Of all the money missing, about \$3,600 was from resident in-house bank accounts. The residents will be reimbursed, and Christiansen expects that the county's insurance provider will cover the loss.

Hecker remained in jail Wednesday night and appears in court at 1:30 p.m. today.

If convicted, she faces four to

15 years in prison.

On June 2, 1993, Hecker pleaded guilty to retail theft and paid a \$200 fine for stealing cigarettes, toothpaste and hygiene products from a Logli Supermarket. Twelve days later, she started full-time work at River Bluff, which only runs criminal background checks on certified nursing assistants.

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Article appeared in Rockford Register Star, Thursday, January 20, 2005, Page 5A