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BUSINESS

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A woman was arrested last week on suspicion of embezzling more than \$150,000 from a Farmington, New Mexico, business.

Lorry Hammargren was charged with 23 felonies, including four second-degree felonies, for allegedly stealing money from Sooner B and B over the course of more than two years when she worked as a bookkeeper there, according to court documents. Sooner B and B is a Farmington oil and natural gas services company.

Jacob Hall, the company's vice president, said it was an off-the-cuff comment Hammargren made about the business' owners that lead to the discovery of the theft.

"She thought she could get the owners to sign anything and that they wouldn't think twice about signing it," Hall said. "She made that comment to me, and it struck me as something an honest person wouldn't say."

That comment was made in early 2013, and Hall then looked over the business' financial records and quickly collected hundreds of pages of documents that he says show Hammargren was stealing. Hall turned the documents over to Farmington police.

Hammargren retired from the business Feb. 1, just as the business was preparing to confront her about the theft, Hall said.

Hall said Hammargren inflated her salary and put a pseudonym on the business' payroll and collected those checks as well.

She also wrote company checks to her daughter and mother and used the company's

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Tracy Rogers said about 11 employees at the business, which has shops in Farmington and Texas, lost their jobs due, in part, to the embezzlement scandal.

"We're going to survive, but it was damn sure a blow to the company," he said.

Tracy Rogers said Hammargren admitted to stealing \$6,500 from the business but said she planned to pay it back. Tracy Rogers said she gave him a \$2,500 check.

Instead of cashing it, Tracy Rogers said he turned it over to the police so it could be used as evidence.

"All we're asking for is justice," Tracy Rogers said. "It boggles my mind that she could get so many families. If she doesn't get jail time, where is the justice? Mentally, for me it has been an absolute nightmare."

Farmington police Detective Paul Gonzales started investigating the theft in August. He asked to speak with Hammargren about the allegations, but she declined and hired Farmington attorney Steve Murphy.

Hammargren was able to avoid pretrial confinement because of a low bond.

The warrant for Hammargren's arrest was filed in Farmington Magistrate Court on Oct. 28. She was originally to be held on a \$160,000 cash-only bond, but it was reduced to a \$5,000 cash-only bond, and she was booked into the San Juan County Adult Detention Center and then released on bond Oct. 30.

She is scheduled to have a preliminary hearing in front of Magistrate Judge Stanley King in December.

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