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Plea agreement pending for accused Mayo thief

BY JEFF KIGER
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“Handicapped” by a lengthy FBI investigation, Olmsted County prosecutors are working on a plea deal with a former Mayo Clinic employee accused of stealing \$172,000 in cash from the clinic in 2016 and 2015.

Stafford Timothy Stafford, 47, is accused of taking the cash during his time as the parking and transportation supervisor in charge of Mayo Clinic’s parking lots and ramps. He was charged with 10 felony charges in February.



On Tuesday, he appeared in Olmsted County District Court, where his attorney, Gary Gittus, entered a not guilty plea for his client. Gittus then told Judge Kathy M. Wallace that a plea deal was being negotiated.

“It does involve restitution to be paid over a sufficiently long period of time,” Gittus told the judge. It’s unclear to what charges Stafford might plead guilty.

A plea hearing was set for Aug. 30.

The case has an unusual history that made it “challenging,” Olmsted County Attorney Mark Ostrem said. Following tips from his co-workers, Mayo Clinic started investigating Stafford in early 2016. Money was found to be missing from Mayo Clinic’s parking department between September 2015 and March 2016.

Investigators found shortages in 2015 of \$49,122.02 for September; \$52,452.69 for October; \$40,411.98 in November and \$19,688.31 in December. While no shortages were discovered in January and February of 2016, a shortage of \$9,447.96 was found in March 2016.

While Stafford denied all wrongdoing, Mayo Clinic fired him on April 12, 2016. Instead of reaching out to local law enforcement, Mayo Clinic turned the case over to the FBI. Stafford was not arrested and remained living free in Rochester.

See **MAYO**, Page **A6**



Photos by Joe Ahlquist / jahlquist@postbulletin.com

Ryan Tebo, assistant area wildlife manager with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, points out a pheasant along a route during the DNR August Roadside Survey looking to count pheasants, whitetail deer, gray partridge, sandhill cranes and other notable wildlife Thursday, Aug. 8, in rural Olmsted County.

Pheasant count gets a tech update

BY JOHN MOLSEED
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A few seconds of chaos and counting yielded the largest single brood of pheasants Ryan Tebo has ever observed on a wildlife survey Thursday.

The highlight came at mile 20 of route three in Olmsted County of this year’s wildlife survey last Thursday. Tebo, assistant area wildlife manager with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, spots birds on the side of a road. One is obviously bigger than at least one or two. He stops the truck and peers through his binoculars.

“We have pheasants,” he said.

As Tebo slowly drives his truck toward where the birds are standing, it’s clear there are more — many more.

At least three young pheasants’ heads are seen occasionally surfacing from the roadside grass as they dart though the ditch parallel to the road. Two more ahead of them briefly jump from the ditch and into a cornfield. The three others follow.

In some areas, pheasants can be rousted from the roadside grass either into the air or onto the road for a more accurate count. In this case, the corn provided an escape.

“Corn rows are like race tracks for pheasants,” Tebo said.

Some blurry photos and recollection leads Tebo to conclude he had spotted a hen and a brood of five chicks — about six to eight weeks old.

The morning survey began with Tebo stopping his truck on a gravel road in rural Olmsted County. Ryan Tebo stepped out of the vehicle and swiped his foot across the dewy roadside grass.

His boot was damp with dew and the first rays of morning sunlight were peeking over a cornfield to the east.

“We passed the first test,” he said. “We can officially conduct the survey.”

Wet grass means wet birds. Wet birds prefer to be dry and will come out in the open to sun themselves.

“(The birds) aren’t always keen on sitting in those damp areas,” Tebo said.

Birds in the open can be



A young pheasant runs into a corn field after being spotted by Ryan Tebo, assistant area wildlife manager with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, during the DNR August Roadside Survey looking to count pheasants, whitetail deer, gray partridge, sandhill cranes and other notable wildlife Thursday, Aug. 8, in rural Olmsted County.

counted. Conservation and wildlife staff across the state scoured miles of rural road keeping their eyes open for notable wildlife for the annual August roadside wildlife survey. One of their main species of interest in the survey is pheasants.

The recent winter of extreme cold and record breaking snowfall followed by

See **PHEASANTS**, Page **A3**

DEA shows unusually high shipments of opioids to small-town Minn. Pills were shipped in highest concentrations per capita to northern Minnesota during height of epidemic

BY PAUL SCOTT
Forum News Service

In late 2016, Minnesota’s office of the attorney general released an exhaustive, 67-page report on the opioid crisis in the state. Though Minnesota had been spared the worst of the epidemic — the pill mills and soaring death rates in Appalachian states, southeastern US and Ohio River Valley — opioid deaths had risen

five-fold in Minnesota since 1999, and Native American communities in the state were experiencing five times the death rate of the state’s white residents.

Having been promoted as medically sound and non-addicting, painkillers were suddenly in the spotlight. In March of that year, the Center for Disease Control warned doctors to stop prescribing opioids for chronic pain. A month

later, opioids took the life of the musician Prince. The AG’s report in the fall of 2016 called on Minnesota lawmakers to fund treatment, rescue drugs, prescription monitoring and more. It was thorough and comprehensive and missing critical information: Someone had to have counted, shipped and sold all of those pills. What did they see?

Shouldn’t they have known something was amiss?

The answer emerged last month in a courtroom in Ohio, as a three-judge panel forced the release of ARCOS (Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System), the Drug Enforcement Administration’s closely-guarded database detailing the hard numbers reported to the DEA from industry sources in accordance with

Pharmacies

Top five, from 2006 to 2012, in Olmsted County, Minnesota.

MAYO CLINIC PHARMACY-MARY BRIGH, ROCHESTER	4,964,500 pills
MAYO CLINIC PHARMACY, ROCHESTER	4,913,700
MAYO CLINIC PHARMACY-EISENBERG, ROCHESTER	3,742,820
WEBER & JUDD NURSING RX, ROCHESTER	1,469,390
HUNT SILVER LAKE DRUG INC, ROCHESTER	1,044,750

THE OPIOID FILES: New data gives an unprecedented look at the opioid epidemic. See it at wapo.st/dea-pain-pill-database. *The Washington Post*

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Myron E. Bernard, Chatfield
Almeda Eickhoff, Spring Valley
Hans B. Koerner, Sussex, Wis.

Anne Mrotz, Mankato
Donald H. Rademacher, Rochester
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