

**BREAKING NEWS** Clown-case killing suspect eligible for death penalty



# Boynton area couple take plea deal in elderly exploitation case

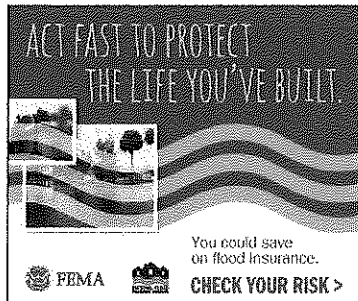


Jane Musgrave - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer  
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Cindy Heller

WEST PALM BEACH — A suburban Boynton Beach couple has been placed on probation, barred from working with the elderly and ordered to pay \$33,000 in restitution after being accused of stealing money from an 87-year-old woman who was suffering from severe dementia.

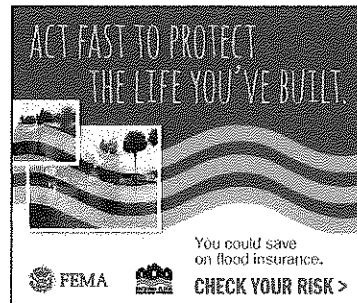


Franklin David Squires, 59, and Cindy Heller, 60, both pleaded guilty in their best interest Monday to charges of exploitation of an elderly person and money laundering in connection with money missing from bank accounts of their neighbor, 87-year-old Belle Winters.

Their best-interest pleas, which means they didn't admit guilt, came as a jury was being selected to weigh the evidence against them. Palm Beach County Circuit Judge John Kastrenakes withheld adjudication before placing them both on probation for four years.

Howard Gale, who had travelled from Connecticut to testify against the couple in connection with his mother's missing money, said he was disappointed they weren't punished more severely. Winters died in 2015 shortly after Heller and Squires were charged.

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"If it was up to me, I would have sent them to prison," Gale said. "When you take advantage of an old person or a kid ... you lose your right to live in society."

But attorney Guy Fronstin, who represented Heller, said the couple didn't steal money from Winters. The money was to reimburse Heller and Squires, who often dug into their own pockets to pay for Winters' doctors visits, household expenses and utility bills. They even bought Winters a new refrigerator, he said.

A doctor told Palm Beach County sheriff's deputies that Winters suffered from Alzheimer's disease and was incapable of making decisions. But Fronstin said a bank official who quizzed Winters before she gave large sums of money to Heller and Squires was going to testify that the elderly woman knew exactly what she was doing. Winters wanted to repay the couple, he said.

As his mother's health declined, Gale said he hired Heller, then Squires, who lived next door, to care for her. In January 2015, he discovered her bank accounts had been cleared out. Palm Beach County sheriff's detectives said they traced the money to accounts held by Squires and Heller.

While Kastrenakes ordered both to make monthly payments to Winters' estate, Gale said he doesn't expect to ever recoup all of it. Fronstin agreed. Both Heller and Squires are disabled, he said.

Gale said his experience should serve as a warning to others whose elderly parents are unable to take care of themselves. "Put all of the assets in your name and don't trust anybody," he said.

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