



Part 1: Long reach for resolution

Hundreds of people contacted Whistleblower this year for help with problems from health insurance to plumbers. Here's an update on just a few of the people I wrote about in 2009.

Greg Lee: Health care coverage

Greg Lee has Type I diabetes and earlier this year lost his COBRA health care coverage. He accidentally underpaid his bill by \$6.82, so the company that administered COBRA for his former employer, LA Fitness, terminated his plan.

When Whistleblower inquired with the U.S. Department of Labor in August, the agency looked into Lee's situation and asked the third-party administrator to reinstate his coverage. Federal law does not allow termination of COBRA coverage due to minimal underpayments, as in Lee's case.

Lee's struggles to afford health insurance haven't ended. His COBRA coverage expired, and he doesn't receive health benefits through his new job in the insurance industry. In January, he will be covered under Minnesota Care, the state insurance program for people who cannot find

affordable health insurance.

He has had an easier time managing his diabetes since he got a diabetic assist service dog named AJ five weeks ago. The golden retriever carries Lee's insulin and can bring him juice or soda. Eventually, AJ will be able to sniff Lee's breath and tell if he has low blood sugar.

Anne Steffan: Contractor problems

After inadvertently hiring an unlicensed plumber to repair her flooded kitchen, Anne Steffan said she has learned her lesson about researching contractors. Last spring, she hired Rodd Hansen, the owner of Advanced Plumbing Services, after a dishwasher pipe burst in her St. Louis Park home. Even though her insurance company paid him \$17,000 up front for labor and supplies, Hansen didn't finish the job. Then Steffan found out that Hansen didn't have a plumber's license and he was facing an almost \$10,000 fine from the state.

Charlie Durenberger, head of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's contractor enforcement unit, told Whistleblower this month that the state has an ongoing investigation into Hansen that could result in increased fines.

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CLAY WALKER
WITH SPECIAL GUEST LEE BRICE
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"At this point, we already issued one order and he ignored that," Durenberger said. "All we're going to be able to do is ratchet the fine up."

Jerry and Scott Rogers: Treatment

Jerry Rogers was successful at getting medical treatment for his mentally ill 47-year-old son, Scott Rogers. Scott, who suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, had refused to get treatment after a doctor warned he might be bleeding internally and could die. Jerry was frustrated at his inability to get help from Hennepin County social workers, lawyers or police. After I wrote about the situation in October, Jerry drove Scott to Hennepin County Medical Center, where he was kept under a 72-hour hold. On Oct. 23, Hennepin County Judge Anthony A. Schumacher issued an order to civilly commit Scott Rogers and an order to require him to take prescribed medications. During the commitment hearing, Assistant Hennepin County Attorney Colleen Brady cited Scott's refusal of medical care and denial of mental illness in arguing for the orders.

Jerry said Scott was held at HCMC for about three weeks, but he has been allowed to return home. He said doctors conducted

tests to find the cause of Scott's stomach pain and determined that it was not life-threatening. While Jerry is still concerned about his son's health, he said he feels more confident that Scott is being looked after.

Tina De Los Santos and Miguel De Leon Duenas: The case of the missing tires

The couple couldn't figure out how someone had stolen their car in August. The car was later found by Fridley police, but it was missing an expensive set of tires and rims. De Los Santos did some detective work and learned that a woman pretending to be the car's owner had walked into Rosedale Chevrolet in Roseville and had a key made for it by presenting an ID and a purchase agreement. General Motors said dealerships are supposed to ask for government-issued photo ID and proof of ownership, such as a vehicle registration or title.

De Los Santos is still trying to persuade the dealership's parent company to replace the tires and rims and install new locks and an ignition. The company has said the dealership didn't do anything wrong.

This winter, De Los Santos left the car in a friend's locked garage. She is too nervous to drive it because she knows someone still has

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a key. She said she is planning to file suit against the dealership in conciliation court in January.

"It's not even about winning," she said. "It's about getting my voice out there and letting people know this is not OK."

Hickory Ridge: Maintenance issues

Residents at the aging townhouse complex in Maple Grove called Whistleblower because they were worried about outstanding maintenance issues. One apartment had a gas leak that went unnoticed for months. Mold outbreaks were common in the units. The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency told Whistleblower that it also had concerns about the conditions at the 32-unit federally subsidized complex so it had offered the owner a \$748,000 grant for updates.

In October, a group of residents wrote a letter to Nationwide Group Inc. worrying that the owner's refusal of that grant meant the property would no longer be affordable housing.

In November, Nationwide promised to inspect each unit and fix outstanding problems. During inspections, residents said the company found between eight and 10

faulty furnaces. For more than two weeks, residents were given space heaters while they waited for new furnaces.

A new manager was assigned to the property earlier this month and residents said they are still waiting to see if their concerns about the long-term conditions are addressed. In a letter to the tenants, a Nationwide representative wrote that the company still has time to decide if it will accept the MHFA grant.

"In the meantime Nationwide must do some 'due-diligence' in assessing the extent of the rehabilitation throughout the project and in providing a reliable estimate of the cost," the letter said.

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