

# Ex-food bank worker not guilty

## She's cleared of theft from Second Harvest

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A former office worker at Second Harvest was found not guilty Thursday of taking \$306,000 from the food bank between 1998 and 2005.

Shuntell Whittaker-Tucker, 39, had worked for the agency for 16 years and faced up to 35 years in prison and fines of up to \$45,000 if convicted on three counts of felony theft.

Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Thomas Donegan, who presided over the non-jury trial, said prosecutors did not prove beyond a rea-

sonable doubt that Whittaker-Tucker took the money or that she was the only one who could have taken the money.

"The agency was victimized by its vague guidelines and poor system for who was responsible for what actions," Donegan said.

He said the state's case would have been helped if Second Harvest "had not been so casually organized and so lacking in the guidelines it followed."

Gina Styer, communications manager for Second Harvest, said it was disappointed with the verdict and called Donegan's comments about the agency harsh. She said Second Harvest is "very

responsible" with its money and that's how the missing money was discovered.

Second Harvest sells food to other agencies or food pantries for 18 cents a pound. The agency has since tightened internal controls, she said. Since Dec. 1, it accepts payments by only check or credit card and no longer takes cash at its window, she said.

The investigation of the missing money at the food bank began in 2005, a time when Second Harvest was also experiencing problems with employee morale, turnover and differences among the board of directors about how the organization is managed. Three board mem-

bers quit.

When Donegan announced his verdict, cheers went up in the courtroom where Whittaker-Tucker's husband and family had gathered.

Her attorney, Michael Hart, said his client was happy with the verdict. "Here she devoted 16 years of her life to an organization, and to have her good name and reputation nearly destroyed is nearly a crime," he said.

As she left the courthouse, she kept repeating to her husband, "God is so good. God is so good."

Assistant District Attorney David Feiss said he was "deeply disappointed" with the verdict.