

NATIONAL VICTORIA

Three years' jail for robbing the dead

By Steve Butcher

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A former trusted manager with the Victorian government-owned financial manager State Trustees who stole \$173,000 from deceased estates was today jailed for more than three years.

Haserota Time, 48, spent the last six of his 13 years with State Trustees — Victoria's largest administrator of deceased estates — systematically stealing, lying and abusing his position.

The County Court had heard that State Trustees' reputation had been damaged and its staff devastated by Time's crimes.

Judge Frances Hogan today told Time that while the reason for his offending remained a mystery, it was a very serious "devious targeting" of deceased estates.

She accepted he had no prior convictions, had pleaded guilty early and had ultimately made full admissions, but his offending was a "grave example" of theft.

Time, who had deposited cheques to clear debts for 36 estates of deceased people into his accounts, used some of the proceeds to pay loans, credit card debts, buy a car for his wife and had also sent money to his mother and grandfather in Samoa.

Judge Hogan heard he had caused "immeasurable damage" to State Trustees' reputation and staff morale and pride.

Senior manager John Brennan said in a victim impact statement State Trustees had been forced to review more than 1700 estates Time had managed when he offended between July 2004 and April 2010.

Mr Brennan wrote how Time lied to colleagues, who were unknowingly involved in his systematic and elaborate crimes, and also circumvented controls that allowed him to act undetected for years.

Staff had also been forced to "defend State Trustees to clients, friends and families", he said.

Prosecutor Helen Fatouros said after Time, a senior estate representative who administered estates that had appointed State Trustees to act, twice tried unsuccessfully in April last year to deposit two cheques, a bank notified State Trustees, which began an investigation.

Ms Fatouros said State Trustees found after Time was arrested that the cheques had been issued through its systems and purported to clear debts relating to 36 deceased persons' estates he managed.

After initially lying to police about the extent of his offending, he later admitted its full scope and his "stupidity".

Defence lawyer Brendan Wilkinson said Time, a father of four, had spent the money "living beyond his means" which had not involved gambling or "wild living" but included buying his wife a \$25,000 car and servicing loans.

Ms Fatouros submitted that Time had been "greedy and had wanted to augment his pay packet" by stealing.

Time, of Wyndham Vale had pleaded guilty to a charge of theft and one of attempted theft.

He was jailed for three years and three months with a minimum of two years.

Managing director Tony Fitzgerald last week told *The Age* that all misappropriated client funds had been repaid with interest and that State Trustees had since "implemented strict new security policies to minimise the risk of future incidents".
