

LOCAL NEWS

BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT

Sisters are still fighting for bilked funds

Gave \$300,000 for overseas investments

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Two years ago, sisters Margo Green and Debra Chinn were each paid \$217,000 for helping federal agents build a case against Home Pharmacy Services of Belleville for stealing millions from Medicare through double billing.

Just 15 hours later, the women gave a combined

\$300,000 to Carol Reis of Belleville in the hopes of doubling the amount through investments.

Green and Chinn claim Reis painted a flawless picture of the possible returns from overseas investments and off-shore accounts and saw no reason not to trust her to invest their money.

They were wrong and have been fighting since last spring

to get the money back from the woman who swindled them.

A hearing will be held Tuesday afternoon in St. Clair County court, where Reis is expected to reveal her assets so that she can begin paying back the money she bilked from Green and Chinn. Reis repeatedly has been ordered by the court to reveal her assets, and the case has been continued several times in attempts to get the documentation.

According to court docu-

ments, Reis was ordered to repay Chinn \$256,801 and repay Green \$253,831. The judgments include the 8 percent interest promised by Reis as well as court costs incurred by Green and Chinn.

So far, Reis has admitted that she receives monthly rent of \$1,200 from Kim Reis for the bar T.R.'s Place at 4901 Concordia Road in Belleville. That money is being garnished to repay Chinn and Green.

The court still is waiting for

information about the assets of a Florida company with which Reis is involved.

A portion of Reis' paycheck from her job in Dupon also being garnished to repay the women. In July, Reis' bank accounts were garnished to help cover the \$431,095 she still owed.

It wasn't until a year after giving the money to Reis that the women learned the promises made by Reis for future riches were impossible.

Sisters lose most of whistle-blower settlement

By Michael Shaw

Belleville News-Democrat

Sisters Margo Green and Debra Chinn helped federal agents build a case against a Belleville company that bilked Medicare for millions.

As a reward for clandestine and nerve work, each received a check for \$217,000 in April 1998 under federal whistle-blower laws — a small portion of the company's ultimate fine, but more money than they had made during their entire lives.

Fifteen hours after receiving their checks, they said they unwittingly gave most of it away.

Green, 42, of Millstadt and Chinn, 44, of Belleville, have spent the last few months fighting to get the money back from a woman they claimed

Claim they were swindled of \$295,000

swindled them. They're also fighting their own shame in letting it happen.

The pair filed a lawsuit in May that alleges each gave \$150,000 to Carol Reis, 56, of Belleville. The sisters allege Reis has failed to pay back the money at an 8 percent annual interest rate.

But the sisters said Reis, a former aunt by marriage of Green's, claimed the 8 percent was a formality and investments would reap much more.

"She said we would double our money in six months," said Green, who admitted being entranced by Reis' claims of complicated overseas investments and off-shore accounts. The money was supposed to be

going to an investment broker in Iowa, but Green said Reis admitted spending it herself. The sisters said about \$5,000 of their \$300,000 loan has been repaid.

At her home Thursday, Reis said she did not have any comment until she consulted with her lawyer. But her lawyer in the suit, Edward Blake Jr., withdrew from the case earlier this month, saying in documents that Reis was not following his advice. As of this week, no other attorney has officially taken the case.

Others claim similar stories which reveal that Reis has turned these loans into a personal cottage industry.

Doris J. Vogel, a 64-year-old Mill-

stadt resident with multiple sclerosis who uses either a wheelchair or a walker, met Reis seven years ago and was completely charmed.

"She's a very attractive woman who comes off very well; she will sucker you out of anything," she said. Vogel began lending Reis money and, at first, Reis repaid the money on time. Then the payments began to lag further behind, she said.

After six years of lending, Vogel said Reis now owes her \$17,500, money drawn from a lifetime of savings and small disability checks, and Vogel is planning to file a lawsuit.

Dorothy Armbruster, a Belleville widow who did not want to give her age, had a similar tale. Armbruster

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said she lent \$10,000, and Reis paid back every cent plus interest. Then Armbruster lent her another \$6,000 in November, expecting the money to be returned within a month. So far, she is still owed \$5,000, she said.

Steve Lemmon of Millstadt sued Reis last year over not paying principal and interest on a \$36,500 loan, but Reis settled the case for an undisclosed amount to Lemmon's satisfaction.

"It took her a while, but she straightened it out," Lemmon said.

Green and Chinn, who lived paycheck to paycheck until they received the \$217,000 on April 27 last year, own up to their naivete when it comes to personal finances.

"I never made more than \$7.50 an hour in my whole life before I

got that settlement," said Chinn, who now earns about \$30,000 a year as a computer programmer. Green hasn't worked since she was fired in 1996 by the company she helped the government prosecute.

There were warning signs: They said Reis claimed to have reaped millions from her investments, but records show she lives in a modest \$39,000 home and owns a Belleville bar valued at \$23,000.

Confident of future riches, each let her remaining \$67,000 stake trickle away. Chinn bought a loaded Ford Explorer. Both helped their dad out of \$15,000 debt and paid off their own debts. There were presents for family members.

Also, the massive tax payment required from the settlement money, estimated to be more than \$75,000 apiece, still lurks. They have no money to pay it and have

filed for extensions.

It was only a year after they turned over the money that they heard from lawyers that the returns Reis promised were impossible.

What angers Green and Chinn most about possibly losing the money is the way they earned it.

They tipped off federal investigators that Home Pharmacy Services of 1520 Mascoutah Ave. in Belleville was ripping off the government by billing it twice for returned medication.

Chinn had quit by the time the investigation began, but Green was the government's inside source, secretly recoding prescription numbers and ferreting the information to agents.

Home Pharmacy Services and its parent corporation, Cincinnati's Omnicare Inc., ended up paying a \$5.3 million fine, and part of that

went to Green, Chinn and their attorneys.

David Yociss, the Belleville company's former manager, now is serving a two-year sentence in federal prison, and Green has her own civil suit against Home Pharmacy, which is scheduled for trial Aug. 11 in St. Clair County. However, the trial may be delayed for months.

For the four women who claim to have fallen under Reis' spell, there is more than the financial loss. There is shame.

"Stupid ... just stupid," Green says now of turning the money over. "But you haven't heard her talk. I've called her house crying and begging her to forgive me."

She and her sister think back to those 15 hours that the money was in their accounts. Their eyes go skyward. But they are speechless.