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Former Camden teachers union chief pleads guilty

By Rita Giordano Inquirer Staff Writer

A former president of the Camden Education Association pleaded guilty yesterday to stealing money from the teachers union by using a union-funded credit/debit card for personal expenses.

Claraliene Gordon, 66, of Fayetteville, N.C., admitted to third-degree misapplication of entrusted property before Superior Court Judge Samuel Natal in Camden, according to state Criminal Justice Director Gregory A. Paw. Gordon was indicted on the charge in November.

An investigation by the state police and the state Division of Criminal Justice showed that Gordon, while president of the union, had used the union-funded card at Atlantic City casinos to help pay for her gambling habit. After union officials confronted Gordon about the misappropriation, she repaid \$7,467 but failed to repay other amounts she charged for personal expenses.

At her plea hearing yesterday, Gordon admitted using the union card for personal expenses exceeding \$1,000.

Under the plea agreement, the state will recommend sentencing her to probation on the condition that she pay restitution. The state intends to recommend setting the restitution amount at \$3,000.

Gordon is scheduled to be sentenced May 16.

She served as president of the union from September 2000 to August 2006.

Gordon's attorney, Rocco C. Cipparone Jr. of Haddon Heights, said Gordon was "relieved to put this matter behind her and to move forward in her life." He added, "In pleading guilty, Ms. Gordon admitted that she misapplied certain CEA funds to her personal use, but to a significantly lesser extent than initially was alleged." He said she used about \$1,800 in union money and had agreed to repay it.