

Angora embezzler sentenced

By Kathryn Reed

Sixteen months — that’s the amount of time John Hellman will spend behind bars for embezzling \$16,574 from the Red Cross that had been donated to assist the 2007 Angora Fire survivors.

Hellman, 49, pleaded no contest to the multiple charges. He was sentenced in El Dorado County Superior Court in Placerville on Wednesday.

“What he did was awful, but I feel that was a fair sentence,” said Keith Cooney, one of the Angora survivors who was affected by Hellman’s criminal activity.

All of the clients Hellman stole from were given their just due by the Red Cross.

Part of Hellman’s sentence is that he must pay back what he stole. The judge also granted the Red Cross’ request to have Hellman pay the \$4,266 the agency has incurred in investigating the case.

The Red Cross was at Wednesday’s hearing, where representatives talked about the three significant impacts Hellman had on their operation.

“He committed a crime against the Tahoe Angora Fire victims, assistance that was diverted away from their needs and into John’s pocket,” Dawn Lindblom, Red Cross CEO in Sacramento, reiterated after the hearing. “The second impact was to the donors who gave to the Red Cross and trusted us. And the third crime was against the American Red Cross by impacting the reputation and mission of the Red Cross.”

Lindblom said her agency believes justice was served.

Hellman worked out of the Community Disaster Resource Center that was established after the fire of June 24, 2007, destroyed 254 houses on the outskirts of South Lake Tahoe.

In court documents, Hellman stole the money between Sept. 16, 2008, and Dec. 20, 2008, in increments ranging from \$840 to \$2,682.

It was through a routine audit after the Red Cross left Tahoe that the financial wrongdoing was discovered.