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County Helping Businesses Recover Bad Checks

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EMILY ZANGARO

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The Eaton County prosecutors office says it's hot on the trail of people writing bad checks. Its special crimes unit has been around four years now, and is so successful, other counties are looking to do the same.

The goal is to get money lost from bad checks back to businesses quickly and cheaply. It avoids the long process of filing a police report and the expense of going to court. It's changed the way one local restaurant does business.

When Famous Taco opened in 2002, owner Lori Mercer says she was reluctant to accept checks. She knew if the check was bad, tracking down the money was often difficult.

Lori Mercer, owner of Famous Taco: "I wasn't really sure on the process of collecting money, so I'd call them, and sometimes they'd answer and sometimes they'd hang up."

The process got much easier when she learned about an economic crimes unit run by the Eaton County prosecutors office. They'd get her money back from bad checks for free.

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Douglas Lloyd, Eaton County Assistant Prosecutor: "We've managed to return $1,031,000 to area merchants in the Eaton County area. This is all monies that is due and owing to them, and we managed to that within the grant period of time."

At first a federal grant and the county funded the unit. Now, after four years, prosecutors say it's self sufficient, taxpayers don't pay a dime. The bad check writer must pay the prosecutors office a fee, when they pay back their check. If they do both, they have no criminal record. If not...

Douglas Lloyd: "We are the prosecutors office, we will take you to court."

The stack of notices prove that Lori Mercer has received what she was shorted. She's so pleased with the service, she's telling everyone she can about it.

Lori Mercer: "They have been absolutely wonderful. We have gotten 100% return, and writing check is 10% of our business, so they have helped us out tremendously."

The economics crimes issues also deals with shoplifting and contractor fraud cases. If you'd like more information, click here.