

Local woman pleads guilty to theft of government funds

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MT. VERNON — An employee of the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority has tendered her resignation, following a plea in federal court.

Mary Barnett-Johnson, 51, of Mt. Vernon, pleaded guilty Friday in U.S. District Court in Benton to one count of theft of government funds. According to an Associated Press story, Barnett-Johnson admitted stealing more than \$85,000 in Social Security benefits after her mother passed away.

Barnett-Johnson faces up to a decade in federal prison after entering the guilty plea on Friday.

Stephen Wigginton, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, says Barnett-Johnson fraudulently received and used her mother's Social Security benefits after her mother's death in 2006. Barnett-Johnson admitted receiving more than \$85,000 in payments from August 2003 through September 2011.

She faces up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000, according to the U.S. Attorney's office.

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Chris Collins, airport manager, said the development was a shock to him and the Airport Authority, which have called a special meeting for 6 p.m. today to discuss the issue.

Collins said Barnett-Johnson submitted her resignation Monday morning.

"I feel like that everybody that knows and works with her is devastated to

hear this news," Collins said Monday evening. "She was a great employee. We never had any problems and never had any suspicions of this. I hope everyone prays for her. She has a difficult future ahead of her."

Barnett-Johnson handled most of the financial matters for the Airport Authority, and during the time she was employed, there were no findings of misappropriated funds found by the airport's auditors.

Barnett is scheduled to be sentenced on May 30. 2-26-13