Employee Who Embezzled $1 Million from St. Louis County Restaurant Sentenced to 21 Months in Prison

by Robert Patrick, U.S. Attorney's Office Communications
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ST. LOUIS – U.S. District Judge Rodney W. Sippel on Tuesday sentenced a man who embezzled just over $1 million from a St. Louis County restaurant to 21 months in prison.

Judge Sippel also ordered Matthew Braasch, 48, to repay the money.

Braasch pleaded guilty in April to one count of wire fraud. He admitted that while a manager of a restaurant in Grantwood Village, in St. Louis County, Missouri, he misused the company credit card to make personal purchases. Braasch was supposed to only use the company credit card for food and to pay state liquor and other taxes. Instead, Braasch spent $81,965 at Target, $29,801 at the Vineyard Vines clothing store, $39,634 at Amazon and over $10,000 on local hotel stays for an acquaintance. Due to the embezzlement, the restaurant lacked money to buy food and pay state taxes. During a state investigation, Braasch posed as the restaurant's owner to conceal his crime, his plea says.

Braasch began stealing to enrich himself during the pandemic, when many restaurants struggled and closed, a sentencing memo filed by Assistant U.S. Attorney Derek Wiseman says.

In court, Wiseman said Braasch was the gatekeeper of the restaurant's funds, and no money would have been stolen without him "allowing it to happen." Braasch stole from the restaurant and then pretended to be the owner and took out loans "all to conceal his theft," Wiseman said.

"Matthew Braasch's greed didn't just betray the trust placed in him, it nearly cost an iconic restaurant its future. By stealing more than $1 million, he inflicted a financial blow that almost put the business under," said Special Agent in Charge Chris Crocker of the FBI St. Louis Division. "Strong financial controls are key to prevent the opportunity to embezzle. When the same employee is responsible for both authorizing and reconciling payments, it creates an opportunity to cook the books. Separating those responsibilities is one of the simplest and most effective ways to prevent fraud."

The FBI, with assistance from the Missouri Department of Revenue, Criminal Tax Investigation Bureau, investigated the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Derek Wiseman prosecuted the case.