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# Chesapeake concierge service facing string of legal troubles

CHESAPEAKE

Kristin Cassen knows her business is a little unusual.

If you have enough money, she'll arrange a Playboy Playmate party for you in Dubai, from her home.

If you're a touring rock band, professional athlete or NASCAR driver, she'll hook you or your crew up with concert or game tickets, entry to an exclusive club or even skydiving.

Cassen, 43, runs Carpe Diem Concierge Services. She, various websites and court documents describe it as arranging discreet, upscale diversions for celebrities and professionals in the entertainment, sports and business worlds while they're on the road.

Such diversions, according to her and the Carpe Diem website - which came down recently but only temporarily, she said - also can include parties and rented personal watercraft, more extreme activities such as "Sniper School," and more pedestrian ones, such as zoo passes and nanny service.

Carpe Diem also advertised that it would arrange bachelor parties and other "men's events."

By far the most common request is for golf, Cassen said. Her wildest diversion, she said, has been hiring strippers to serve as caddies.

She largely blames the kind of business she's in for a string of legal troubles.

Most recently, according to her and court documents, trouble came after two local businessmen asked her to plan a \$75,000 weekend excursion to the Persian Gulf city-state of Dubai. It was to feature upscale accommodations, golf and limousines, million-dollar real estate pitches and a party headlined by Playboy models.

The trip hasn't happened, and the businessmen want their money back.

Cassen called it a contract dispute - she has kept her end of the bargain but the men failed to sign enough paying guests to make it work, she said.

But the men complained to police, and the commonwealth's attorney's office secured embezzlement indictments against Cassen. She goes to trial next month.

Cassen also faces June hearings on related perjury and unrelated credit card fraud charges brought by an ex-boyfriend - all misunderstandings or spite accusations, she said in a recent interview.

She said she's confident that she'll prevail.

"To the average person, it's a lot of money," Cassen said. "But for what I do, it's not a lot of money.... I think where a lot of anger from the police comes is because they think it's a lot of money."

Planning for the Dubai trip began in February 2009, according to court documents.

Kenneth "Kent" Basnight, chief executive officer of Basnight Land and Lawn in Chesapeake, and John Babb, listed in online sites as president of Ocean Consulting in Norfolk, gave Cassen half the cost upfront - \$37,500 - to begin making plans and reservations through her subsidiary company, Signature Gala Events.

Basnight and Babb opened credit card accounts she could use, so they could amass free airfare miles.

But they and a grand jury alleged that by the end of August, Cassen had not set up the trip, had used the cards to pay personal and other business bills, and had not paid off the balances.

Basnight and Babb had to pay because the credit card company also shut down their unrelated business accounts, according to a search warrant filed in the case.

According to Cassen and an unexecuted copy of an agreement with Basnight and Babb that she provided, they were partners in arranging a May 2009 group trip, and potentially quarterly ones, to explore real estate investment in Dubai.

A company there wanted to showcase multi million-dollar condominiums. Cassen was given \$37,500 to make arrangements, including hiring three Playboy models and dozens of local women to socialize at a party, and took Basnight and Babb on separate planning trips to that emirate, she said.

The businessmen's responsibility was to sign up enough guests at \$5,000 each to cover the costs and possibly provide a profit they would split, including a percentage of sales commissions if guests bought property. But the economy turned sour, and they signed up no one, Cassen said. She found some golfers to go at a reduced rate, but Basnight and Babb wanted out of the contract, she said.

But she had spent money and the contract had no cancellation clause, she said. She did her job, she said, and she considers the party to be on hold until a Tiger Woods-designed golf course opens, possibly in August, to attract more golfers.

"At best, we're talking about a contract issue, not a criminal issue," said Fred Taylor, Cassen's attorney.

Basnight and Babb didn't return multiple phone calls seeking their comments. Police and the commonwealth's attorney's office have policies of not commenting on pending cases.

At least twice before, the same authorities have accused Cassen of business-related wrongdoing,

according to her, one of her lawyers and court records.

A Circuit Court judge dismissed a charge of obtaining money by false pretenses halfway through a 2007 trial. The commonwealth's attorney's office two months later decided not to prosecute an embezzlement charge.

In civil court, a festival client dropped a lawsuit against her in 2006 before it came to trial. Seventeen months later she won a summary judgment against the same client over a contract.

Cassen has referred to several entertainment groups and celebrities as clients, including singer Kid Rock, rock groups Green Day and Nickelback, and NASCAR drivers Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Jeff Gordon.

But she told police in a previous case the agreements were oral only. Letters from several of those NASCAR and entertainment organizations filed in that case said they had no dealings with Cassen or Carpe Diem, and others said that there were no formal agreements.

Others told police, according to court documents, that she has traded concert tickets for race credentials and arranged activities for Kid Rock's road crew.

Attempts to reach people giving testimonials on her old website were unsuccessful. She said her clients often seek privacy; one she said she asked to call a reporter for this story never did.

Kevin Martingayle, a Virginia Beach attorney who previously has represented Cassen, said she works with the lower echelons of those organizations, and so there's no reason the celebrities or their close representatives would know her.

"I think it's a very innovative and intelligent business she has," Martingayle said.

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