

Timidity on Townsend

Soft time for Bruce

The former Northampton manager, who admitted stealing from taxpayers, was immediately placed on work release — even though he's unemployed.

Bruce Townsend got off easy. The former and disgraced Northampton manager, who pleaded guilty to stealing more than \$100,000 of taxpayer money, was given a jail term Wednesday — if you want to call it that.

Essentially, he'll bunk at the county prison. Daytime, he goes to work.

This is because Townsend, 55, was immediately assigned work release by county Judge Kenneth Biehn. Only thing is, Townsend doesn't have a job.

Maybe we misunderstand the program, but isn't an inmate supposed to have work in order to be released to go to work?

At any rate, Townsend was sentenced to serve one to two years. It'll never happen. In addition to being allowed out every day, Townsend could be out of jail altogether in six months, when the judge said he could apply for house arrest. Put money on it — he'll get it.

All of that brings Suzanne Newsome to mind. The former and disgraced Bristol Township manager two weeks ago was sent to jail for swindling taxpayers out of 14 grand — a fraction of what Townsend swiped. Newsome, sentenced by President Judge David Heckler, was sent to a state prison. That's what you call hard time.

The difference, from what we can figure, is that Newsome put up a fuss. She didn't cooperate with investigators and fought the charges at a trial. But her

big mistake, the one that apparently doomed her, was lying to a grand jury investigating corruption in Bristol Township.

Heckler cited that at sentencing.

Townsend, on the other hand, raised a white flag immediately. He cooperated with investigators, although he didn't say how much money he took. As a result, taxpayers had the added cost of \$45,000 for lawyers and accountants to comb through township records. That cost was added to restitution, bringing Townsend's IOU to \$157,000.

Having sold his house, Townsend showed up in court Wednesday with a \$100,000 check. Who says money can't buy happiness, or at least less unhappiness?

Still, Townsend will have plenty of gloom in his life.

Just 10 years short of retirement, Townsend had to surrender his half-million-dollar pension and, of course, his \$107,000-a-year job, which came with a free car, gas and insurance. He also surrenders at least some of his freedom, and his reputation as one of Bucks County's most respected and knowledgeable township managers. He'll also be on probation for five years after serving his time. Additionally, he faces 300 hours of community service.

So while Townsend didn't get the kind of jail time he might have deserved, he's lost a lot of what he had, much of which he'll never recover, including his good name. That's a life sentence of sorts.