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VERDICT

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Detroit Free Press

APRIL 28, 2000 Friday METRO FINAL EDITION

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Detroit Free Press

Found on Freep.com

Section: NWS; Pg. 1A

Length: 939 words

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Dateline: MT. PLEASANT

Body

For 24 years, William Hackel was the law in Macomb County. He snared robbers, murderers and rapists, and was hailed as a champion of victimized women and children.

On Thursday, a jury gave him a new label -- rapist -- and sent him to share a cell with an armed robber.

An Isabella County jury found him guilty of two counts of rape for two acts during the assault.

"This is a sad day," said Macomb County Prosecutor Carl Marlinga. "He was the last person you would expect this to happen to."

Marlinga, who testified as a character witness for Hackel, called him one of the most trustworthy public officials he knows.

But the jury's six men and six women sided with the 26-year-old woman who said Hackel, 58, raped her Oct. 11 at the Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort in Mt. Pleasant.

Portrayed by Hackel's attorneys as a lying opportunist who cried rape after regretting a tryst with the sheriff, the woman said she was shocked and pleased with the verdict.

Isabella County Prosecutor Larry Burdick hailed her as a "woman who had the courage to come forward and run the gauntlet that has to be run in these types of cases."

"Women who suffer from these kinds of assaults can see that the system can work for them," he said, adding that he thought the jury was swayed by the woman's telling of her ordeal and by the testimony of those who saw her after the attack.

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But Hackel's attorney, James Howarth, called the woman's testimony "the stuff great actresses are made of."

He said jurors faulted Hackel for cheating on his wife and held him to a higher standard because he is a law enforcement officer.

"If Sheriff Hackel were a custodian in the hotel, it is now my belief that he would have been acquitted," Howarth said.

He said he will seek a new trial and appeal Hackel's conviction, adding that he had not considered the grounds for his appeal.

Hackel appeared calm and upbeat before he entered the courthouse where the jury ended 10 hours of deliberations over two days.

"We're thinking this is going to be two not-guilty verdicts," Hackel said. He added that if convicted, "I hope I can handle it with the class of Walter Budzyn."

Budzyn and fellow Detroit police officer Larry Nevers were convicted in 1993 of second-degree murder for beating Malice Green. Those verdicts were overturned years later and they were convicted of a lesser charge.

Once inside the courtroom, Hackel patted his visibly agitated son Mark on the shoulder, looked into his wife Ada's eyes and put a finger under his chin as if to say, "keep your chin up."

"I got it, I got it," he said softly but forcefully, flashing his family the thumbs-up sign as the jury entered the courtroom.

When the verdict was announced, Hackel showed no outward emotion as his son Mark gasped "Oh my God," his wife doubled over in tears and his sister, Linda Ahearn, shook her head.

"This is terrible, that is not right," Ahearn said as her brother was escorted out of the courtroom. Hackel did not look back at his family. His son William Hackel III comforted his stepmother.

Hackel's victim, who was not in the courtroom when the verdict was read, reportedly cried when she heard the news.

Circuit Judge Paul Chamberlain said jurors did not wish to discuss their verdict in public.

As Mark Hackel, a Macomb County sheriff's inspector, rushed out of the courtroom, he said to Saginaw Chippewa casino police investigator Clare Fox: "You investigated like hell. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Within hours of his conviction, his bond and his job revoked, William Hackel became inmate 000080998 at the Isabella County Jail, where he will share a 10-by-12 foot cell. Sharing cells is common practice there.

Macomb County Undersheriff Ronald Tuscany will be in charge of the department temporarily until a panel of three -- the county prosecutor, clerk and probate court chief judge -- choose someone to be sheriff for the remaining six months of Hackel's term.

Hackel, who said he had significant legal fees, said he put his Clinton Township home up for sale.

Hackel is to remain in jail until his sentencing. He faces up to 15 years in prison on each count.

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Howarth said he would ask the Michigan Court of Appeals to free Hackel until his sentencing, which is expected to occur late next month.

Stunned by Hackel's conviction, family and friends said they still believe in his innocence.

Ada Hackel, who was portrayed throughout the trial as her husband's other victim, spoke briefly with reporters after visiting him in jail.

"My husband is innocent. I love him with all my heart," she said.

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HACKEL'S CAREER HIGHLIGHTS SHOW POPULAR OFFICIAL

Macomb County Sheriff William Hackel built a reputation as a respected lawman and popular elected official.

Here's a look at Hackel's career:

- * 1964: Hired as a Macomb County sheriff's deputy.
- * 1972: Promoted to sergeant.
- * 1977: Succeeds 16-year Sheriff Lester Almstadt as Macomb County's top cop. He is 35.
- * 1984: Elected vice president of Michigan Sheriffs Association.
- * 1987: Named March of Dimes Alexander Macomb Citizen of the Year.
- * 1988: Named 1988 county elected official of the year by Michigan Association of Counties.
- * 1992: Comes under fire for distribution of reserve or special deputy badges to hundreds of people, many of whom are friends.
- * 1996: Elected to sixth term as sheriff.
- * Nov. 17, 1999: Charged with criminal sexual conduct in alleged rape of a 25-year-old woman.
- * April 27, 2000: Hackel found guilty of criminal sexual conduct.

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Notes

HACKEL CONVICTED; SEE RELATED ARTICLES, PAGE 8A. SIDEBAR ATTACHED.

Graphic

Photo WILLIAM ARCHIE, Detroit Free Press; Photo MICHAEL SAMOJEDEN, pool photo; Photo;

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William Hackel's wife, Ada, and son Mark react to an Isabella County jury's guilty verdict Thursday. Hackel was found guilty of raping a woman last October. He had told his family to expect acquittal.

William Hackel, 58, faces up to 15 years in prison on each count.

Macomb County Sheriff William Hackel is led to jail from the Isabella County Courthouse in Mt. Pleasant. Hackel, 58, faces up to 15 years in prison after being convicted Thursday of rape.

At age 35, William Hackel succeeded a 16-year Macomb County sheriff in 1977.

Load-Date: January 29, 2002

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