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## Ex-cop guilty of teen rape



Staff photo by Jennifer Lyles



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**Jury also convicts former officer on two counts of lewd molestation**

**By D. E. Smoot**

<http://muskogee phoenix.com>

Jurors took less than two hours to reach three guilty verdicts for a former Haskell police officer painted by prosecutors as “the ultimate sexual predator.”

Robert Samuel Wheeland, 54, was convicted Friday of molesting and raping a 15-year-old girl to whom he presented himself as a mentor and confidant. The 11-woman, one-man jury recommended a 15-year prison sentence for each of the three convictions.

One of Wheeland’s daughters — who appeared to be the defendant’s only supporter throughout the trial — fought hard to hold back her tears as the verdicts were read. Tears of joy filled the eyes of the victim’s mother.

Wheeland sat straight, looking forward as the bailiff read the three guilty verdicts — two each for lewd molestation and one for second-degree rape. Wheeland was acquitted of procuring or distributing child pornography.

An alternate juror who listened to 2 1/2 half days of testimony predicted the guilty verdicts two hours before they were read in open court.

“I don’t think it looks very good for him,” Cheryl Banning said about Wheeland’s prospects. “The inconsistencies (defense lawyers tried to emphasize) were minimal and had nothing to do with anything I think will sway the jury.”

While Wheeland was being tried only for the crimes alleged by one victim, two girls told jurors this week that Wheeland molested and raped them. Banning said she found the testimony of both girls credible.

“These girls were like fish in the ocean,” Banning said. “He (Wheeland) is the shark preying on them.”

The mother of the girl at the center of Wheeland’s first trial — he has three additional cases pending for similar crimes — said she was proud of her daughter.

“My daughter did a wonderful job,” Allison Hale said of the girl’s testimony. “He wouldn’t have been put away if not for her.”

Hale said she was looking forward to calling her daughter, whose testimony dominated the four-day trial, and telling her about the verdict.

“There was no way I was going to let this thing go,” Hale said. “He (Wheeland) deserves what he got.”

Assistant District Attorney Nikki Baker Dotson said she was pleased with the verdict.

“I think the jury’s decision to sentence him to 15 years in prison is significant,” Dotson said. “That’s

how old his victim was when he raped her.”

Chad Richardson, Wheeland’s defense lawyer, said he was disappointed with the verdict.

“I don’t make it a practice second-guessing the jury,” Richardson said. “But any time other allegations are allowed to be introduced as evidence, you’re going to take a hit.”

During a pretrial motions hearing, Dotson successfully argued her case to introduce testimony from one other girl with whom Wheeland is alleged to have sex. The girl’s testimony, Dotson said, was necessary to show a pattern of Wheeland’s behavior.

A total of four girls have come forward with similar allegations against Wheeland. Associate District Judge Norman D. Thygesen allowed the testimony of one of those girls, who told jurors she came forward with her allegations after she learned he had sex with one of her friends.

Muskogee County Sheriff’s Investigator Jan Ray, who is leading the Wheeland investigation, said she was pleased with the verdicts.

“I am looking forward to helping the district attorney’s office successfully prosecute the other three cases,” Ray said.

Richardson said he plans to file notice of his client’s intent to appeal the convictions.

Wheeland, who faces the prospect of three more trials for similar charges, is scheduled to be sentenced at 1:30 p.m. June 11. He is being held in the Muskogee County/City Detention Facility.

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