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Woodbridge Twp. officer convicted of sexual assault

Douglas Karlson to be sentenced on Sept. 21

BY KATHY CHANG Staff Writer

A 49-year-old former Woodbridge police officer has again been convicted for sexually assaulting his stepson, now 28, over a two-year period beginning when the boy was 14 years old.

After deliberating for about four hours, the jury on June 19 in state Superior Court, New Brunswick, found Douglas Karlson guilty of aggravated sexual assault and sexual assault upon his stepson between June 26, 1994, and June 25, 1996. He will be sentenced on Sept. 21.

This was the third trial for Karlson, who was an 18-year veteran of the police department. The jury in the first trial, which occurred in July 2006, ended in a hung jury. Karlson was convicted of the charges in December 2006; however, in August 2008 a state appellate court reversed the convictions and the case was remanded for a new trial.

The case involving Karlson and his stepson was spawned from charges against Karlson relating to an incident with a Colonia girl who was 15 years old at the time. The former police officer was charged with taking hundreds of suggestive photographs of the girl between Oct. 1, 2004, and May 10, 2005.

The charges in that case included a second degree count of endangering the welfare of a child, a third-degree count of endangering the welfare of a child, and a second-degree count of official misconduct. He was convicted on all counts in July 2006.

During that trial, Karlson admitted taking pictures of the girl, the daughter of Ann Marie Dobbs, whom Karlson first met when he was a police officer responding to a police call.

Karlson admitted that he had had an affair with Dobbs and said they were intimate a few times. He also admitted to taking partially nude photographs of the girl, but said he did so with the permission of the girl and her mother.

Karlson's stepson testified that he kept his secret of being sexually abused quiet for years until he heard about the investigation of his stepfather involving the 15-year-old girl when he read it in the newspapers. In the recent trial, he was not allowed to relay any knowledge he had about the case involving the girl.

The appellate court found that the lower court erred in allowing the two cases to be tried in conjunction with each other. Karlson will be retried on the case involving the 15-year-old girl, but no trial date has been set yet.

☐ The stepson testified that he did not come forward earlier because he thought no one would believe him, since Karlson was a Woodbridge police officer.

"I couldn't bring myself to tell anyone," he said. "It has taken everything in me to come forward. I am embarrassed by it."

He said he believed that if he had come forward sooner, he could have stopped what happened to the 15-year-old girl.

After confiding in some friends, he went to Woodbridge Police Lt. Dennis Forman, who was a sergeant at the time, who referred him to Investigator Rajesh Chopra of the Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office on June 2, 2005.

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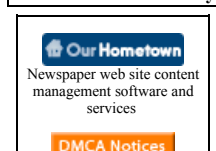
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On June 3, 2005, the victim stated to Chopra that he had been sexually abused by Karlson at his stepfather's residence in Old Bridge about every two months between June 26, 1994, and June 25, 1996.

Karlson and his wife, Donna, testified, and both denied the boy's account that Karlson sexually assaulted him. The boy is Donna's biological son.

The stepson had also testified that Karlson had beaten him and his sister, who, he said, was also molested by Karlson. The sister has since died, and Karlson has denied the allegations.

Thomas Buck, Karlson's Milltown-based defense attorney, asked the stepson why, when he initially talked to Chopra, he talked about his sister's molestation.

"It was easier for me to tell someone else's situation than mine," he said.

Woodbridge Police Officer Dominick Rossetti Jr., a 16-year veteran of the police force, testified on behalf of Karlson. He had worked on the same squad with Karlson for two and half years.

"How would you describe Doug's work [ethic]? Was it conducted with truthfulness and with veracity?" asked Buck.

"It was outstanding," said Rossetti, who said he has socialized with Karlson outside of work.

The stepson's younger brother, who is 23 years old, testified that he acknowledged that his older brother and his father did not have a good relationship.

"Did you know about the allegations against [your father]?" asked Assistant Prosecutor Christie Bevacqua.

"Yes," he answered.

"Do you know any reason why your brother would make these allegations up?" asked Bevacqua.

"No," he said shaking his head.

Buck said Karlson plans to appeal the conviction.

Contact Kathy Chang at

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