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UPDATE: Former Ripley Police Officer Pleads Guilty Before Trial



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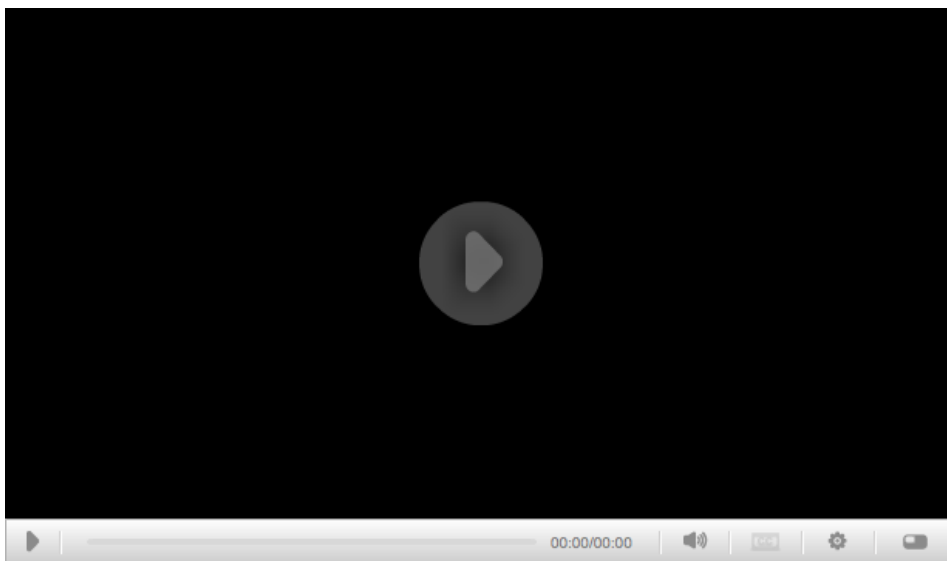
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6pm 2/18/11: Mistrial Declared

6pm 2/16/11: Trial Underway

6pm: Police Officer Indicted

UPDATE 8/9/11 @ 11:30 a.m.

JACKSON COUNTY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- A former police officer from Ripley has admitted to breaking the law.

Denver "Buddy" Thomas pleaded guilty last week to contributing to the delinquency of a minor. He was indicted on a sexual abuse charge back in February 2010.

Thomas was accused of fondling a girl and making out with another girl during a teenage party at his house.

He went on trial late last year on the charges, but a mistrial was declared after a witness' testimony. The prosecutor called the testimony unfair.

Thomas will be sentenced on October 21.



UPDATE 2/18/11 @ 6:35 p.m.

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- Just days into the trial of a former Ripley police officer accused of sexually

assaulting a teenager, a jury is heading home, but without a verdict.

A witness led the judge to declare a mistrial after the prosecution raised concern with getting a fair trial, as did the judge.

The prosecutor told the judge one of the defense witnesses was destroying the credibility of the victim.

Denver "Buddy" Thomas was indicted last year on a felony charge of sexual abuse by a person of trust.

He's accused of fondling a 15-year-old girl and making out with another teen during drinking parties at his house.

His son and other friends say that never happened, and Thomas' attorney says there is no proof Thomas was ever there.

One defense witness, Thomas' mother Thelma Thomas, testified to events the prosecution called unfair.

Judge Thomas Evans immediately told the jury to disregard the testimony.

After an hour-long recess the judge returned, saying it's in the public's interest to have a fair trial to achieve justice, especially since Thomas was a Ripley police officer when the alleged crime happened.

"We want the public to have confidence in what we're doing, confidence in what's taking place here is the correct, fair result," Evans said. "I can't in good conscience describe the posture of this case as leading to a fair result."

Neither the prosecutor nor the defense attorney asked for the mistrial.

Both sides actually objected, hoping for a resolution sooner rather than later, but the judge said he just couldn't do that since it had to be a full and fair trial.

The jury was dismissed, and a new trial is set for Aug. 9.

UPDATE 2/18/11 @ 1:45 p.m.

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- A mistrial has been declared in the case of a former Ripley Police Officer accused of fondling a teenager.

Denver "Buddy" Thomas was indicted last year on a felony charge of sexual abuse by a person of trust.

The judge declared a mistrial because of witness testimony. The judge and prosecutors were concerned after the testimony that Thomas would not be able to get a fair trial because of the testimony.

Thomas is accused of fondling a girl and making out with another girl, during a party at his house.

His attorney says there is no proof that Thomas was ever in the room.

A new trial has been set for August 9th.

We have a crew in the courtroom. Keep clicking WSAZ.com for more updates.

UPDATE 2/16/11 @ 7:10 p.m.

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- Accused of breaking the law he was supposed to uphold -- a former police officer is standing trial for sexual assault against a young teenager.

Denver "Buddy" Thomas worked for the Ripley Police Department for six years until West Virginia State Police opened an investigation on sexual allegations.

Thomas was put on paid leave and later fired after he was indicted last year on a felony charge of sexual abuse by a person of trust.

Thomas has a wife and a teenage son, and it's one of his son's friends whom Thomas is accused of fondling in the fall of 2008.

Thomas sat and listened to a young teenage witness.

"He said, when I turn 18, things would be different, and we could do stuff," the witness said. "Have sex."

Opening arguments started with the plaintiff stating Thomas provided alcohol nearly 10 times to his son and his friends at their house in Kenna.

"Where most teens would have to sit and worry about, 'Are the cops going to catch them?', these teenagers didn't have to worry about it," attorney Fred Gengenbach said. "They were partying with the very person who was supposed to catch them."

On two separate occasions, the plaintiffs argued it went too far, accusing Thomas of assaulting one young girl and making out with another.

The defense argued there's no proof Thomas was even there, let alone had contact with the girls.

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"There will be no forensic evidence brought to you by the state because there is none," Attorney George Cosenza said. "No hair evidence, no semen evidence, no blood evidence and no evidence we call forensic that might back up the story that she told police."

Cosenza argues Thomas and his wife were in their bedroom together and had no knowledge of what their son may have been doing with his friends in the garage.

Witnesses say Thomas was there with them, allowing them to drink up and later taking advantage of one of those girls who was only 15 year old at the time.

Now it's being left up to the newly selected jury to weigh both sides of a police investigation, and a case that's becoming a she said, he said.

Wednesday was the first day witnesses were called to the stand.

If convicted, Thomas could face 10 to 20 years in prison.

UPDATE 2/16/11 @ 11:15 a.m.

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- The trial of a former Ripley police officer accused of sexually assaulting a teenage girl is getting underway.

Jury selection for the case against Denver "Buddy" Thomas started Tuesday.

Thomas was indicted last year on a felony charge of sexual abuse by a person of trust.

The case claims Thomas raped a 15-year-old girl at his house in 2008.

He was fired from the Ripley Police Department after working there for six years.

A court official says the opening statements will continue today at noon.

If convicted, Thomas could face 10 to 20 years in prison.

Keep clicking WSAZ.com for the very latest.

UPDATE 3/5/10 @ 11:05 a.m.

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- A former officer from Jackson County, West Virginia found himself on the other side of the law on Friday.

Denver "Buddy" Thomas was arraigned on a sexual abuse charge. Click here to find out more!

During the hearing, Thomas pleaded not guilty.

The indictment alleges he had sexual contact with a teenager back in 2008.

Thomas was fired last week from the Ripley Police Department. He has until next Wednesday to post a \$20,000 bond or he goes to jail until his trial.

His trial is set for June 1.

UPDATE 2/25/10 @ 4 p.m.

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- Denver "Buddy" Thomas appeared in a Jackson County courtroom Thursday morning to answer the indictment.

Thomas will be officially arraigned on the sexual abuse charge on March 5.

According to a courts spokesperson, bond was set at \$20,000. Thomas has until his hearing to post it.

UPDATE 2/24/10

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- Ripley City Council unanimously voted Wednesday night to terminate Officer Denver Thomas.

That happened after Ripley Police Chief Raymond Fridley recommended that Thomas be dismissed from the police force. His termination is effective immediately.

Thomas had been indicted earlier Wednesday by a Jackson County grand jury. The indictment alleges he had sexual contact with a teenager in 2008.

Thomas has been on paid leave from the department since September 2009.

No other information is being released because the case involves an underage child.

ORIGINAL STORY 2/24/10

RIPLEY, W.Va. (WSAZ) -- A Ripley Police officer has been indicted on a sexual abuse charge.

According to a court spokesperson, Denver "Buddy" Thomas has been indicted by a Jackson County Grand Jury.

The charge involves a minor, so no other information is being released.



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Thomas was indicted on one count of sexual abuse by a parent, guardian, custodian or a person in a position of trust.

Ripley Police Chief Raymond Fridley tells WSAZ.com that Thomas is still on the department, but was placed on administrative leave last September.

"The public needs to realize you know, we are out there to protect the public and take care of them," Fridley says. "That is our main goal to make sure they are safe in this town."

Fridley says Thomas has been on the force for six years and was a training officer with the department. Fridley says prior to this, there were no complaints out of the ordinary filed against him.

The West Virginia State Police trooper investigating the case says that Thomas, who is also known as "Buddy," established a relationship with the teenage girl. Things then allegedly went too far.

Fridley says that if there are more victims out there, they need to step forward.

"It is an ongoing investigation," he says, though he says he hopes the allegations are not true, but reiterated, "Nobody is above the law."

A prosecutor and a State Police trooper out of Kanawha County are handling the investigation.


Keep clicking on WSAZ.com for the very latest information.

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