

Former Novato cop avoids jail in lewdness case

By Gary Klien , Marin Independent Journal

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2015 Cop Pedophile Michael Manuel Ramirez



Novato police officer Michael Ramirez appears in Sonoma County Superior Court on Jan. 29, 2016, in his lewdness case. At left is his defense attorney, Jane Gaskell. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)

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A former Novato police officer who exchanged lewd images with an 8-year-old girl avoided jail time at his sentencing Monday.

Michael Manuel Ramirez, 36, of Rohnert Park, was placed on probation for three years, said Jason Riehl, a Sonoma County prosecutor.

Ramirez was also ordered to participate in the Safer Program, a Sonoma County rehabilitation program that stands for Sex

Offenders and Families in Effective Recovery.

The judge also sentenced Ramirez to 90 days in custody, but he will not have to serve actual jail time. If he is not accepted into an alternative detention program such as house arrest, he will have to serve 300 days of community service, Riehl said.

Ramirez will not have to register as a sex offender.

Ramirez was sentenced by Judge Patrick Broderick in Sonoma County Superior Court. Ramirez's defense attorney, Jane Gaskell, declined to comment on the sentence, which was in line with a plea bargain.

The investigation began last year in Texas, where the parent of a girl discovered she was sending and receiving lewd images with a man online, police said. The parent called police, and the case was referred to a computer crimes task force.

Investigators then took over the girl's account and posed as her to continue the conversations with the man. Detectives eventually traced the man's internet account to the Rohnert Park residence of Ramirez and his wife.

Rohnert Park police obtained a search warrant for the home and the computer equipment in the residence. Ramirez was not arrested while police and prosecutors conducted further investigation

over several months.

In January, Ramirez was arraigned on two felony counts, possessing child porn and coaxing or coercing a minor to produce lewd images, and a misdemeanor count akin to child harassment.

Ramirez resigned from the Novato Police Department after he was charged. He had worked there for about six years.

In August, he accepted a plea deal from the prosecution, pleading no contest to attempted stalking, a felony, and a misdemeanor charge of sending lewd images to a minor for purposes of sexual gratification.

A prosecutor said the case was partially hampered because the girl and her mother fell out of contact with authorities.

Ramirez could have faced up to 18 months for the attempted stalking conviction.

Ramirez was the second member of the Novato Police Department to quit the force this year amid criminal charges. On Jan. 20, Dan Jenner resigned his job as a sergeant after pleading guilty to embezzling more than \$1,500 from the police union.