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Different pictures of accused presented

Trial of ex-teacher begins

Denton Thomason
Journal Reporter

Dueling attorneys painted starkly contrasting portraits Tuesday of a former elementary teacher accused of sexually abusing two second grade students.

Ronald Floyd Manners, 49, who has pleaded not guilty, is standing trial on two felony charges of child sexual abuse amid allegations that he inappropriately touched two students on their genital area over their clothing.

One incident allegedly occurred at his Vinita residence on May 28, 2015, when he invited an 8-year-old girl over for the afternoon to play with other children at his wife's home daycare.

The wife and other children were not at the home during the victim's stay, other than Manners' infant granddaughter, records show.

The child disclosed to her mother and grandmother about a month later that Manners allegedly rubbed her leg, kissed her on the mouth and touched her private area, court records show.

The other incidents occurred sometime during the 2013-14 school year when a student, age 8-9 at the time, said that

See Accused Page 12

Accused

Continued from Page 1

Manners allegedly touched her on multiple occasions while she read in a chair next to him during class. That revelation was disclosed in June 2015 after Manners had been arrested and stories had appeared in the media.

The prosecutor described Manners as acting purposefully and that investigators caught him in multiple lies while being interviewed.

"Two little girls have come forward and said that he touched them on their private parts," Assistant District Attorney Kali Strain said in court.

"This is not an accident. This defendant did this purposefully. He used his authority as a teacher... he orchestrated this whole deal for when his wife wasn't there," Strain told jurors Tuesday afternoon.

"Every brick in this road leads to him being found guilty," Strain said.

Defense attorney Thomas Mortensen said that Manners was a victim of "gossip" and demanded a jury trial because he would "never plead guilty."

Mortensen said that investigators combed through Manners' entire life, including searching his cell phone and computer, along with interviewing students on his roster and children attending his wife's home daycare.

"There are no child photos here. There's no incriminat-

ing evidence. There's nothing out there to indicate that Mr. Manners was the kind of person who could do something like this," Mortensen said.

He added that the mothers of both alleged victims had been sexually victimized themselves in the past.

Both of the alleged victims testified in open court Tuesday afternoon accompanied by a specially trained companion dog.

The mother and grandmother of the child alleged to have been abused at Manners' home testified on Wednesday morning.

Journal policy is to not identify victims or relatives of alleged sexual abuse.

The mother testified that her daughter "really liked Mr. Manners throughout the year" and was one of the best students in his class. She recounted that her daughter didn't like Mr. Manners very much after her visit to his wife's home daycare.

She recounted how she

thought it was "strange" for no other kids to be there, as the primary purpose of the visit was for her to check out the daycare operation and meet Manners' wife.

When she left about an hour after dropping off her child because she had to go to work, she believed that Manners' wife and other daycare kids would be retuning shortly from an errand.

The alleged victim's grandmother also testified that her granddaughter wasn't acting like her normal self when she later picked her up that afternoon, but was acting withdrawn.

"After going to his house, she wasn't the same kid," the grandmother said, noting that her granddaughter became "clingy" with her and her mom, but also began acting aggressively toward other men in the family while on a vacation held a few weeks after her stay at Manners' home.

The court has scheduled the

trial to continue through the rest of the week.



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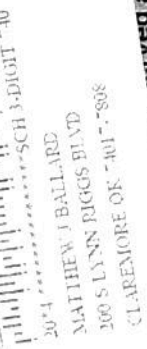
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The Vinnie Ream board invites one and all to join in a 20th birthday party at the Craig County Community Center.



The tickets are \$10. Happy hour at 6 p.m.; all the Live at the Ream musicians will be on hand to entertain. Carol Castor, former board member and longtime supporter of the Cultural Center, will give a short program on the history of the Cultural Center.

VINITA DAILY JOURNAL, FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2018 **50¢**

Jurors hear details of 'pretext' call

Mother of alleged victim pushed former teacher to admit what he had done

Denton Thomason
Journal Reporter

Jurors watched videos of forensic interviews, heard testimony from investigators and listened to a recorded conversation between the mother of one of the alleged victims as the trial of a former Vinita second-grade teacher

accused of sexual abusing two of his students resumed. Ronald Floyd Manners, 49, who has pleaded not guilty on two counts of child sexual abuse, was flanked by more than 20 friends and relatives Thursday morning as day four of his trial resumed. Manners is accused of touching

the private area and kissing the lips of an 8-year-old student at his Vinita residence on May 28, 2015, when he invited the child over for the day to play with other children at his wife's home daycare. The wife and other children were not at the home during the victim's stay, other than Manners' in-

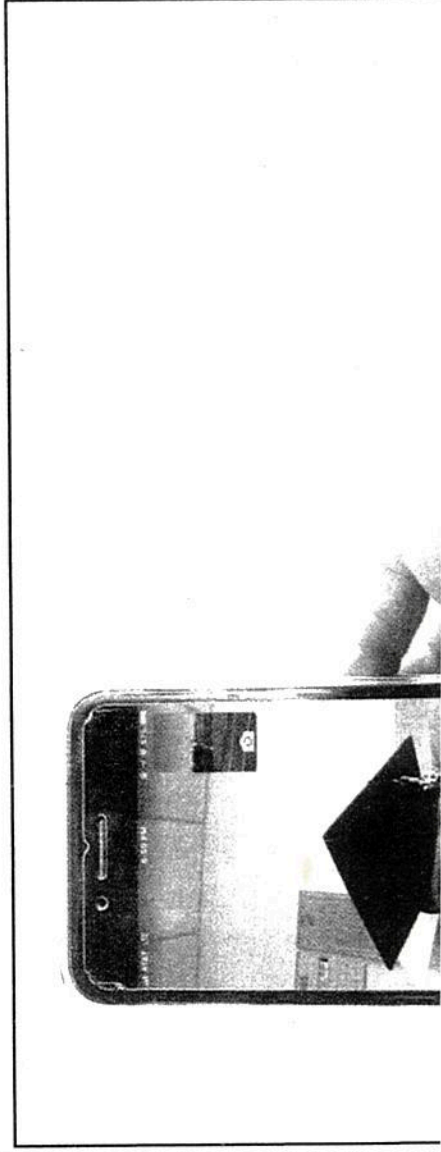
fant granddaughter, records show. The other alleged incident occurred sometime during the 2013-14 school year when a student, aged 8-9 at the time, said that Manners allegedly touched her on multiple occasions while she read in a chair next to him during class.

See Jurors Page 1.

Senior graduates from hospital bed over her iPhone

Angela Thomason
Journal Reporter

Who would have believed that one day student could virtually graduate from Vinita High School over her phone? Suzi Hood did just that from a hospital be



Jurors

Continued from Page 1

Jurors listened to a "pretext" phone recording between Manners and the mother of the child who stayed the afternoon at Manners' home on Thursday morning.

Investigator Gary Stansill of the District Attorney's Office explained that a pretext call is a tactic used by law enforcement to collect more information from a suspect without them knowing that police are listening in.

In the 45-minute recording, the mother repeatedly pushed Manners into admitting "exactly" what he did and to apologize for the incident.

News Briefs

Assessor's office closed Friday

The Craig County assessor's office will close Friday due to the staff attending a conference. The office will re-open on Tuesday.

"I promise you I didn't wet while walking outside following a heavy rain that morning, he said that he only did that so that she could hold his infant granddaughter, who sat on top of the washing machine.

"I promise you that it'll never happen to another kid," Manners said at another point in the conversation. Stansill testified that he usually clears about as many suspects as he arrests in child sex crime cases, and noted that Manners gave several indications during the pretext call.

Stansill testified that Manners "immediately" went into explaining away the specific allegations when confronted by the mother. "There's all those details about the interactions. It's like he was expecting that call. He talked about some aspects, sitting on the washing machine and the kissing. He said if he did rub her, it's more like incidental touching," Stansill said.

"He was very patient with 45 minutes of accusations," he added. Stansill said that oftentimes a person accused of sexually

abusing a child will admit to certain parts of the allegations, but not the specific acts themselves for fear of the social stigma attached to child molesters.

Police Lt. Jared Langley, the primary investigator of the Vinita Police Department, testified that Manners sent a series of text messages to the mother the morning of May 28, 2015, inviting her daughter to come over to his residence.

That evidence was collected from the mother's iPhone, but a search of Manners' older flip phone showed that thread of text messages had been deleted.

Langley added that Manners' phone was set to automatically delete text messages after a certain period of time. Defense attorney Thomas Mortensen suggested that auto-delete feature was intended to save storage space on the older-model flip phone.

The jury also viewed a pair of lengthy video recordings Wednesday afternoon between the two alleged victims and a forensic interview specialist that took place at the

Child Advocacy Center in Claremore. The video recording shows both girls disclosing the allegations to the child specialist at the center.

Manners, who has remained stoic throughout his trial, at one point briefly shook his head back and forth while watching one of the videos. The jury was also showed photographs of Manners' classroom that depicted a tall daughter "did not like see chair by his desk parked next to his lower-seated chair by school.

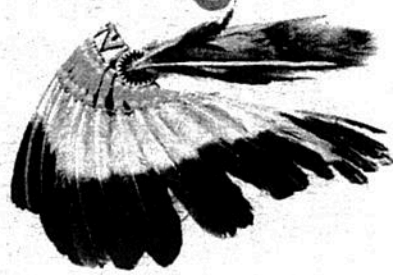
She alleged that her daughter disclosed to her that Manners inappropriately touched her "every time" she would read in the chair unless she place her hands over that part of her body.

Langley said the purpose of the photograph was to show how low Manners' office chair was from the tall chair the students sat in, to show

how it made it easier for him to allegedly touch them. Langley testified that no other Hall-Halsell classroom has the same setup and believe that Manners' brought the tall chair on his own account noting that it was not on the school inventory.

The mother of the girl allegedly abused in Manners' classroom during the 2013 14 school year said that he daughter "did not like see on grade" but now she love school.

She alleged that her daughter disclosed to her that Manners inappropriately touched her "every time" she would read in the chair unless she place her hands over that part of her body.



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Jury deliberates in child sexual abuse case

Denton Thomason
Journal Reporter

The fate of a former second-grade teacher accused of sexually abusing two students rested in the hands of a jury as they began deliberating their verdicts just after noon Friday.

Ronald Floyd Manners, 49, who has pleaded not guilty on two counts of child sexual abuse, was flanked by more than 20 supporters as his weeklong trial concluded and the jury was sequestered.

The punishment for child sexual abuse is 25 years to life in prison.

Manners is accused of touching the private area of two students.

One incident allegedly occurred at his Vinita residence on May 28, 2015, when he was home alone with an 8-year-old girl who had been dropped off at the home daycare under the pretense that they were to play with other children.

The other incident allegedly occurred sometime during the 2013-14 school year when a student, age 8-9 at the time, said that he touched her on multiple occasions while reading in a chair next to him during class.

Assistant District Attorney Kali Strain said during her closing arguments that she thought throughout the previous night about what to say to jurors.

"What keeps coming back over and over is the enormous trust we place in teachers... that person shattered that trust," Strain said, glowering at Manners. "Manners shattered that belief."

"For what? So he could gain access to them. To take his hands... and get some sick, twisted pleasure. That's why we're here," Strain said.

"Those two little girls sat in this courtroom and told

See Jury Page 7

Continued from Page 1

strangers across the room that Manners, who is sitting just 10 feet away from them, did things that nobody wants to think about. Those two girls stood up and proved to you that 'he' touches kids. They got to come into a room full of people and talk about the most horrific thing that ever happened to them," Strain said.

Strain said Manners inviting a student over to his wife's daycare when she and other children weren't there was planned.

"It was schemed. Why? So that he could be alone

with these little girls. So he can touch them for his sick, disgusting pleasure. That's why," Strain said.

Defense attorney Thomas Mortensen told jurors in his closing statement that multiple witnesses in this case gave inconsistent testimonies.

"We have to rely on the words of these individuals and how truthful and credible they are. Think about what the system is designed to do. It's designed to get convictions," Mortensen said.

He stated that Manners has already suffered.

"If you acquit Mr. Manners, do you think the school will hire him back and give him back pay? His career is gone, let's face it. He'll

never be able to walk into a public place without people whispering and somebody pointing, 'That's the guy,'" Mortensen said.

He also noted Manners' age. Manners will turn 50 this December.

"The state is asking you to hand down a death sentence. That's what the state is asking for. We do not 'guess' people into prison. Do not give this man a death sentence based upon a guess. Don't do it," Mortensen said.

Strain countered, "He made his life this way because he chose to do what he did. When do you want him back?"

The jury was still deliberating as of 2 p.m. Friday.

and purchased headstones for at least 100 veterans over the past 20 years, and has worked with members of the Dale Peace Post on other projects as well.

"We were able to get markers up at two mass grave sites at Fairview Cemetery with help from the Legion several years ago with help from Wanda Norton when she was over the museum. The two mass veterans grave sites were the location of Union soldiers and the Indian soldiers who fought with Union soldiers during the Civil War," Schofield said. "We continue to work with families needing information on getting headstones for members of their loved ones



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Blood drive to be held Tuesday at St. Francis Hospital

Oklahoma Blood Institute will hold a blood drive in Vinita on Tuesday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., on an OBI Bloodmobile parked at Saint Francis Hospital, 735 N. Foreman.

Donors will receive a limited edition "Give Local" T-shirt, and a pass for two to Safari Joe's H2O Water Park! *

Donors will also receive a coupon for a free honey butter chicken biscuit from Whataburger and a chance to win Whataburger for a year.

As a non-profit blood center, Oklahoma Blood Institute's donors provide every drop of blood needed for patients in more than 160 hospitals, medical facilities and air ambulances statewide including Saint Francis Hospital Vinita. Approximately 1,200 volunteer blood donors are needed each day to maintain the supply.

Appointments are not required but can be made by calling Oklahoma Blood Institute at 877-340-8777 or visiting obi.org.

*Sixteen-year-olds must weigh at least 125 pounds and

provide signed parental permission; 17-year-olds must weigh at least 125 pounds; 18+ year olds must weigh at least 110 pounds. Blood donation not necessary to enter prize drawing.



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News Briefs

Library to be closed

The Vinita Public Library will be closed Memorial Day Weekend on Saturday and

THE JOURNAL

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FRIDAY, MAY 30, 2018

50¢

Former Vinita teacher found guilty of child sexual abuse

Denton Thomason
Journal Reporter

A jury of six men and six women took just over four hours of deliberation before returning a guilty verdict late Friday against a former Hall-Halsell second-grade teacher accused of sexually abusing two students.

Ronald Floyd Manners, 49, was found guilty on one count of child sexual abuse at approximately 4:30 p.m. Friday.

The penalty for child sexual assault is 25 years to life in prison and requires that at least 85 percent of the sentence be served.

Manners did not take the stand and no witnesses were presented on his behalf by defense attorney Thomas Mortensen.

The guilty verdict was handed down for an incident that occurred at Manners' Vinita residence on May 28, 2015, where he was accused of touching the genital area over the clothing of an 8-year-old girl who had been dropped off alone at the home daycare under the pretense that she was there to play with other children.

But Manners' wife, who ran the home daycare, was camping on that day and no other children were present at the home.

The jury found Manners not guilty on a second count of child sexual abuse regarding an allegation that Manners touched the private area of a student during the 2013-14 school year, when she was age 8-9, when she and Manners would read together in a chair seated by his desk.



A flag flies over Fred Day.

See Guilty Page 12

Guilty

Continued from Page 1

Manners, who was flanked by more than 20 family members and supporters, placed his head on the table for a moment after the verdicts were read.

Several of his family members wept in court, as did at least two of the jurors.

District Judge Terry McBride thanked the jury for their service, citing that serving on a jury is the most patriotic thing you can do to serve your country other than

active military service.

"I'm so thankful that these victims, in my mind, got the justice they deserved. It takes so much strength to come forward when you have been a victim of sexual abuse," Assistant District Attorney Kai Strain said in an interview

after court.

Strain noted that while only one of the two charges ended in a guilty verdict, she considers the outcome as justice served on behalf of both victims.

"They waited three years for this," Strain said.

She also praised the work of Police Lt. Jared Langley and Investigator Gary Stansill of the District Attorney's Office, as well as the families of the victims.

"It couldn't have been accomplished without the extraordinary effort and investigation by Detective Langley and Investigator Stansill, and the support the families gave

their daughters," Strain said.

The father of one of the victims declined to comment after court, but shared a letter written on behalf of the family three years ago after Manners was charged.

"Please know that our family is focused on the healing and recovery of our child. We ask that our privacy is respected. We encourage any parent of a child who has come in contact with this man to talk to their daughter. Our daughter has shown incredible strength and courage. She is brave and we are incredibly proud of her. If you suspect that your child has been the victim of a crime of any na-

ture, be it by this man or any other person, please have that conversation with them," the letter read.

The father added that prosecutors had offered Manners a plea bargain where he could have served one year in jail with 24 years suspended, an offer that was hoped to spare the two victims from having to testify in open court, but the offer was rejected.

Manners was remanded into the custody of the Craig County Sheriff's Office after the verdicts were read. He will appear in court next on July 9 to be sentenced.

Calf Fry

Continued from Page 1

activities for kids, all free, courtesy of the chamber.

These include a mechanical bull, train rides and bungee jumping.

Other food vendors will

a Cow Patty Bingo event.

Chamber Director Monica Bagwell said she has been told that the first poop to plop on the cow patty bingo grid is set to start at 1 p.m.

Cow Patty Bingo tickets are \$5. Prizes include: \$500 cash, two \$10 El Cabrito gift

Calf Fry.

Proceeds from chances to win cash depending on where the bombs drop will go for a good cause - the Craig County Community Crisis Center.

The cooking teams will be judged early, and awards for winning categories will