Ex-Scout leader convicted of sexual assault

By Jerry Shnay

Onetime Boy Scout leader Thomas Hacker of Burbank was convicted Wednesday night of two counts of aggravated sexual assault involving an 11-year-old member of his Scout troop.

After a trial that lasted more than a week, jurors deliberated 6 hours and 40 minutes before returning their verdict in the Bridgeview branch of Cook County Circuit Court.

There were audible cries of appreciation and relief from the boy, his tearful mother and members of the families of many other boys who said they were victimized by Hacker on overnight campouts.

Hacker, 53, will be sentenced Dec. 13 by Judge Lester McCurrie.

The normal sentence for such crimes is 30 years in prison, but that can be doubled if a crime is particularly heinous.

"I hope Thomas Hacker spends the rest of his life in jail," said Assistant State's Atty. James McCarter, one of two prosecutors. McCarter said there was "no doubt he [Hacker] was manipulating doctors and the system. But thank God for common sense."

Jurors asked for transcripts of medical and psychiatric testimony during their deliberations.

"Sign your names to the guilty ballot," McCarter had urged the jury of 10 men and 2 women in final arguments. "He took kids into his tent and slaughtered their dignity. Say no more Hacker. No more."

Hacker, who was convicted of a sex crime in Indianapolis in 1970 and in Mt. Prospect one year later, was convicted on two counts of aggravated criminal sexual assault against the youth, who is now 14. Those incidents took place on Boy Scout overnight trips in December, 1986, and again in June, 1987.

Defense attorney Elliot Price had crafted a plea of insanity and argued that Hacker was a man out of control. "I am not asking you to condone his actions," he told jurors. "I ask you what is the reason for his behavior."

But McCarter, along with co-prosecutor Robert Parchem, painted a different picture of Hacker. "He is a liar," Parchem said. "He is a manipulator. He is a schemer. When he thought he could get away with it [the crimes], he did. He knew enough not to get caught."

Besides testimony by the victim, other Boy Scouts testified that Hacker engaged in sexual acts with them. And a psychiatrist, called by the defense, said the defendant estimated that he had molested "at least 100 boys through the years."

Parchem said Hacker would seduce the boys by giving them backrubs and "saying things they wanted to hear. It was a magic language. . . . It was slick. . . . This was a man who contemplated what he does and waits for an appropriate time to do it. He had a different tune for every dance."

Parchem argued that Hacker was intelligent enough to dupe psychiatrists examining him. "Look at the scheming," he said. "Look at the planning he did."

At one time Hacker, who was once married and is the father of three children, was director of the Burbank Park District. He also held various jobs in the suburbs and Chicago in the last 20 years, including a teaching position with the Chicago Board of Education.

But sooner or later, Hacker's credentials would be challeneged, and he would leave. "People around him would sweep it under the rug," Price said. "He was exposed but continued to do the same thing."

Burbank police first investigated Hacker in connection with a theft of $575 from the Park District safe in November, 1987. Hacker asked officers to drop the probe and said he put $600 back into the safe although maintaining he never stole any money.

After his arrest, on Feb. 10, 1988, he was charged with sexual offenses against 11 Boy Scouts, all between the ages of 10 and 14, over a seven-year period.

According to five boys who testifed during the trial, Hacker committed oral sex on them in tents or cabins on campouts.