

Sex offender on probation gets 50 years

A Stafford man who couldn't get past his violent sexual fantasies despite several years of court-ordered counseling has been sentenced to 50 years in prison for aggravated sexual assault of a child seven years ago.

The defendant, 26-year-old Joseph Christopher Vela, committed the crime in May 2000 and agreed to plead guilty 12 months later. He was given a sentence of five years deferred adjudication in 2001, but prosecutors this year charged that he broke conditions of his probation.

Assistant District Attorney Sherry Robinson said this was the third time Vela had failed to successfully complete his required sex offender treatment program. Twice before the court modified his probation conditions, giving Vela additional opportunities to successfully complete the counseling.

Judge Thomas Culver III of the 240th District Court has presided over Vela's case since its inception, and he issued the 50-year prison sentence.

Evidence presented at the hearing showed that despite having been in several different sex offender treatment programs, in addition to being treated by a psychiatrist, a neurologist and an individual therapist, the defendant continued to have deviant sexual fantasies, which were becoming increasingly violent. Vela's current therapist, a licensed sex offender treatment provider, testified he told her he had sexual fantasies involving young children, raping older women and skinning people alive.

Vela also told his therapist that he liked the "CSI" and "Cold Case Files" TV shows because they helped him avoid the mistakes the characters made when committing crimes.

"Judge Culver's sentence of 50 years in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice was very fitting for this defendant," said Robinson. "This sentence will bring justice for the defendant's victim, but just as important it will keep the children of this community safe from someone who would not avail himself of the help he was offered and who continued to have deviant violent sexual fantasies. Now, he will not be able to live out those fantasies at the expense of another child."

Aggravated sexual assault of a child is a first-degree felony punishable by five to 99 years or life in prison and a fine up to \$10,000.

Robinson prosecuted the case with the assistance of Suzy Morton and Lisa Guerra. Ralph Gonzalez represented the defendant.