

Nickols gets life in prison, girls find justice

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A Blairsville man will spend the rest of his life in prison.

Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge Stanley Gunter sentenced Cory Nickols to life in prison last week following his April 20 guilty verdicts on all counts of



Cory Nickols

molesting two young girls, ages 8 and 11, in August 2013.

The April jury trial of 35-year-old Nickols lasted eight days and resulted in convictions of aggravated sexual battery, aggravated child molestation, three counts child molestation and two counts enticing a child for indecent purposes.

Sentencing occurred in Union County Superior Court on Friday, June 3. The actual

sentence has Nickols serving life plus 40 years, with the first life plus 20 years to be served in confinement and the rest on probation.

Among other evidence, prosecutors with the Enotah Judicial Circuit brought to light that Nickols had committed a similar crime as a teenager in Louisiana.

Prosecutors Buck Levins and Chase Queen, aided by Circuit Investigator Kenny Crook and Union County Sheriff's Office Investigator Andrew Hammond, proved without a reasonable doubt to the jury that Nickols committed the sexual assaults in 2013 against the two female children.

The crimes occurred on two different dates in July 2013 in Union County.

The Union County jury quickly came back on Wednesday, April 20, with a guilty verdict before Judge Gunter.

At the conclusion of the case, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley thanked his entire trial team for this difficult and complex case.

"I especially want to thank Buck Levins, the lead prosecutor on the case, and the team that assisted him: Assistant District Attorney

Scam...from Page 1A

Harrison, 33, of a Louisiana address, approached a Blairsville woman asking to give her an estimate on replacing her driveway, according to UCSO Lt. Daren Osborn.

At first, the men seemed to be in luck, as the woman agreed to take them to her house – but as soon as she got into her vehicle with the two men following closely behind, she called 911 and asked that a deputy meet her outside of the jail as she drove to the sheriff's office, according to Lt. Osborn.

The men followed her in their 2016 Dodge truck straight to the sheriff's office, and Sgt. Brandon Hogsed greeted all three when they arrived, according to Lt. Osborn.

"Upon their arrival, Sgt. Hogsed did what he was supposed to do, and he got their IDs and ran them," said Lt. Osborn. "Harry Harrison had two felony warrants out of Acworth for manufacturing marijuana and possession of a concealed weapon, and they placed a hold on him for that.

"So during that time, (we) got permission from him to search the vehicle that he was driving, which was a 2016 Dodge 2500, and they found a controlled substance, a Schedule IV narcotic, in the truck, and not in its original container."

Subsequent to the search and discovery of Xanax, both brothers were charged with felony possession of a controlled substance, and both were charged for not keeping drugs in their original container, according to Lt. Osborn.

And while this savvy citizen aided the authorities instead of potentially becoming a victim – the men were not arrested for running a scam, only for the drugs – Lt. Osborn said it's all too common to fall prey to men trying to run a scam, especially for the elderly.

"They just pick a random subject, and they say, 'We want to talk to you about paving your driveway,' and she just led them to believe, 'Sure, let's go – I'll take you to my house,'" said Lt. Osborn, though the story ended differently than people typically hear.

Usually, a driveway paving scam will see an unsuspecting homeowner allowing workers to come in and do work on their driveway, and the work is always unsolicited by the homeowner.

When the driveway is all torn up, the scammers will up their estimate before continuing work, taking a job that initially cost only hundreds of dollars to costing thousands of dollars. And the end result is always poor, shoddy workmanship, with driveways that need re-replacing.

"We've warned people about them over and over and over, and it's been all over the scanner, I know, for the last two or three months, people calling in about them," said Lt. Osborn of people running this particular scam. "This is not the first time we've run into (scammers). A couple months ago we arrested some that had some outstanding warrants, and also had drugs on them, that came in here from out of state."

If you've fallen prey to anyone in connection with a driveway paving scam, Lt. Osborn would like you to contact the Union County Sheriff's Office without delay.

Chase G. Queen, Investigator Kenny Crook and Victim Witness Advocate Holly J. McCollum."

Added Langley: "I also want to thank Investigator Andrew Hammond (Union County Sheriff's Office) for his excellent work on the case. This difficult case has brought

justice for two young, abused children."

Investigator Hammond said it was a team effort to bring Nickols to justice.

"It was definitely a team effort," Hammond said. "Prosecutors, law enforcement and all the witnesses helped seal a conviction."

UCSO...from Page 1A



Union County Sheriff's Deputies gather round as Sheriff Mack Mason gets ready to bless the meal

minutes," said Sheriff Mason. "Of course we're always on call. It gives everyone a chance to bring their kids and family and have a picnic in the park.

"We don't have a lot of time to get together it seems like. Everybody is going their own way, doing their own thing and working different shifts. This job is 24/7. We hope to have a good meal and I'm glad everyone could come out to be together today, even with the weather being what it is."

The menu for the day consisted of freshly grilled hamburgers and hotdogs, crisply fried Mississippi catfish fillets, homemade hushpuppies, French fries, fresh watermelon, strawberry shortcake and homemade chocolate chip cookies.

"Those who are contracted with the jail donated the supplies for this picnic," said Sheriff Mason. "We really appreciate that. They do such a wonderful job feeding the inmates.

"We're very thankful for them. They do just an outstanding job. Even though a lot of the jail personnel were off today, they pitched in and helped put together this meal, which I'm truly grateful for."

Before the meal began, Sheriff Mason offered a word

of gratitude for his team, for always doing their best to serve and protect the county.

"Thanks for coming out today," said Sheriff Mason. "I hope you have a good time, even though we had a little rain today, but Lord knows we needed it.

"Again, I appreciate all of you for coming. There's a lot of food up there, eat all of it you want and can."

Added Sheriff Mason: "I appreciate all of you from the bottom of my heart, the hard work you've done is outstanding. You all make me look good."

Capt. Doug Loyd offered a word of prayer over the meal before everyone crowded into the gazebo to chow down on the fine fixings.

Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carroll and Union County Tax Commissioner Lee Knight also came out to celebrate the occasion, catching up with old friends and looking forward to what the year has in store.

All in all, good fellowship and quality time was had by all who came out for the picnic, and nobody can wait until the next time they can all gather at this year's Annual Sheriff's Christmas Party to enjoy each other's company again.



Union County Tax Commissioner Lee Knight drops in to the UCSO Annual Summer Picnic