



TANEY COUNTY PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

JEFFREY M. MERRELL, PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

P.O. Box 849

FORSYTH, MO 65653

www.taneycountyprosecutor.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CONTACT: JEFF MERRELL
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
(417) 546-7260**

DATE: JANUARY 14, 2008

**DEFENDANT PLEADS GUILTY DAY OF TRIAL TO ASSAULTING GIRLFRIEND
WITH AXE HANDLE**

FORSYTH, MO – Taney County Prosecuting Attorney, Jeffrey M. Merrell announced today that GARY JEAN HARDMAN, DOB: 4/28/1969 of Hollister, Missouri plead guilty without a plea agreement today to the class A felony of assault in the first degree and the unclassified felony of armed criminal action. The Taney County Prosecuting Attorney's office was set to begin a jury trial this morning on those two charges.

In April of last year, after getting into a verbal altercation with his girlfriend, GARY JEAN HARDMAN drove her to the scenic overlook on Highway 165 in Taney County. At the scenic overlook, he pulled her from his vehicle by her hair, beat her severely with an axe handle, and attempted to toss her over the protective fence barrier. He later retrieved her from the scenic overlook, and took her back to her apartment on Arlene Street in Branson where he tried to clean up her injuries. A roommate walked in on GARY JEAN HARDMAN washing blood off the victim in the shower and proceeded to contact the Branson Police Department. As a result of a follow-up investigation, Deputies with the Taney County Sheriff's Department later recovered a bloody axe handle from the trunk of GARY JEAN HARDMAN'S vehicle. Besides multiple contusions and lacerations, the victim from the beating suffered two broken ribs, a wound to the head that required eight staples to close, and a broken arm that was later repaired with the insertion of a steel rod.

Tiffany Yarnell, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney was pleased with the result stating, "this was a horrific and senseless act of domestic violence, and we need to do everything we can to encourage individuals that are in abusive and violent relationships to seek help before they end up like the victim in this case." Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, Christopher W. Lebeck went further saying, "although we are frustrated that the Taney County citizens who were called for jury duty had to spend their Monday morning at the Courthouse for a trial that never materialized, this plea without an agreement today is proof that the pressure of a trial by jury still works."

Sentencing in this case is set for March 6, 2008. The class A felony of assault in the first degree carries with it a range of punishment of ten (10) to thirty (30) years, or life imprisonment. The unclassified felony of armed criminal action has a range of punishment of not less than three (3) years imprisonment.

For more information please visit www.taneycountyprosecutor.com

MAIN OFFICE: (417) 546-7260 | FAX: (417) 546-2376

BAD CHECKS: (417) 546-7261 | FAX: (417) 546-3184

VICTIM/WITNESS: (417) 546-7263 | CHILD SUPPORT: (417) 546-7264