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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DEFENDANT SENTENCED TO 25 YEARS FOR 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 was sentenced to twenty-five (25) years for the class A felony of assault in the first degree, and twenty-five (25) years for the unclassified felony of armed criminal action, with both counts to run concurrent. On January 14, 2008 GARY JEAN HARDMAN plead guilty without a plea agreement 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 that 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, "this sentence should send a strong message that we will not tolerate domestic violence in our community, and that if you hurt someone you will be prosecuted."

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

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