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**DATE: MAY 19, 2011**

**CORTEZ GUILTY OF DEVIATE SEXUAL ASSAULT**

On Tuesday, May 17, 2011, in the Circuit Court of Taney County, a jury found Manuel Cortez (d.o.b. 06/06/1956), of Branson, guilty of deviate sexual assault. After the verdict, Circuit Court Judge Mark Orr scheduled a sentencing hearing for July 21, 2011.

On September 4, 2009, at the Leisure Country Inn motel on Highway 76, in Branson, Missouri, Manuel Cortez sexually assaulted a fourteen year old girl. Cortez lived at the motel, as did the victim's family. Cortez had befriended the girl and her family during the weeks leading-up to the assault, and on September 4<sup>th</sup> the victim was visiting the room where Cortez lived.

After sexually assaulting the victim digitally, Cortez left his room briefly to find out where the victim's parent was. When Cortez left the room, the victim escaped to a commons area at the motel. At that point, Cortez asked the girl not to tell anyone what he had done, and gave her a ten dollar bill. The victim then, just minutes later, told her brother and other family members what Cortez had done, and Branson Police responded to the motel.

After Cortez was placed in custody and transported to the Branson Police Department, officers began booking him in on criminal charges. On surveillance video from the booking room, Cortez could be seen licking his fingers. Once officers observed the strange behavior by Cortez, his hands were swabbed in an effort to obtain possible DNA evidence that might support the victim's allegations about the sexual assault. Once tested by the Missouri State Highway Patrol Crime Lab, the victim's DNA was found in swabs from defendant's hand.

The jury deliberated for just under two hours before reaching a unanimous verdict of guilty on the crime of deviate sexual assault. The crime of deviate sexual assault is a class C felony, which carries a maximum sentence of seven (7) years in prison and/or a maximum fine of \$5,000.00.

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