

Mr. J. Row

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# LOCAL NEWS

## Computer network operator guilty of sodomy

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Ralph MacMichael,  
prosecutor

■ Judge orders Mark Forston to jail until sentencing on June 21.

By Pablo Lopez  
The Fresno Bee

A Fresno jury convicted Mark Forston Monday of sodomizing a 16-year-old boy, whom he lured to his Tower District home in March 1990 after the two chatted through a computer network.

Jurors, who deliberated six hours in Fresno County Superior Court, also found Forston guilty of three felony counts of attempting to distribute harmful material with the intent to seduce a minor.

Judge Frank J. Creede Jr. revoked Forston's \$25,000 bail and

ordered him held in Fresno County Jail until he is sentenced June 21. Forston faces up to 10 years in prison, lawyers said.

Authorities said the Forston case may be the first computer-sex crime case in Fresno County. Forston, 51, a painter and wallpaper installer, operated a sexually explicit computer-telephone line network that catered to the gay community.

"Give all the credit to the Fresno Police Department. The case was thoroughly investigated," said prosecutor Ralph MacMichael, a deputy in the District Attorney's Office.

MacMichael said the key to the case was the victim, who testified to his relationship with Forston and who accurately described

Forston's bedroom.

The victim testified that in March 1990, he was socially withdrawn and seldom left home when he became acquainted with Forston through the computer network Forston operated from his home. He said he told Forston he was 19 at the time — since Forston required that users of his computer network be adults.

Chatting through the computer, the teen-ager and Forston became friends, exchanging messages laced with sexually explicit language about homosexuality.

When they finally met in person at a restaurant, the teen-ager said he told Forston he

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## Forston: Computer organizer found guilty

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was 16. He said Forston then lured him to his home under the guise of giving him computer software.

The teen-ager said Forston kissed him, fondled him, then threatened and sodomized him in Forston's bedroom.

Forston testified that he knew the teen-ager, but did not meet him in person until May 1992 at Forston's preliminary hearing. He said the teen-ager trumped up the charges after Forston kicked him off the computer network for lying and because he was looking for dates.

"I'm disappointed in the verdict," said Forston's lawyer, Gar-

rick Byers. "There will be an appeal filed."

According to court records, Fresno police began investigating Forston in February 1992 when detectives received a tip that he was advertising in newspapers for young male models.

Forston was arrested March 13, 1992, after having a computer conversation with Detective Frank Clark, who was posing as a 15-year-old boy. Clark said Forston sent him pornographic material through the computer.

Forston posted bail, but was arrested a second time on April 7, 1992, when the 19-year-old told police Forston had sodomized him two years earlier.