

METROPOLITA

Pedophile gets 30-year sentence

By Greg Seigle
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A 31-year-old Alexandria man was sentenced to 30 years in prison yesterday for videotaping himself fondling 10 young girls at the electronics store where he worked, sometimes while their parents shopped a few feet away.

Thomas A. Dietrich, a confessed pedophile, faced up to 210 years behind bars for fondling the girls, who ranged in age from 2 to 6, at the Luskin's store in Fairfax City from September 1992 to April 1993.

But Fairfax County Circuit Judge Thomas Fortkort sentenced the former salesman to five years each for six counts of sexual battery and added 10 years' mandatory probation after Dietrich is released from a state penitentiary.

He will be eligible for parole in about five years, lawyers said.

"He deserves to have life in there," said Laura Fulmer, 23, of Fairfax, the mother of a 6-year-old girl who was fondled on camera by Dietrich. "Put him in with the [prison] population and let them take care of it."

Dietrich's wife, who said she was sexually abused as a child, agreed with the sentence.

"I feel sorry for Tom, but mostly I feel sorry for the children," said

Lucia Dietrich, 29, who turned him in to police after finding two of the videotapes under a bureau.

"Children never forget, no matter how young you are," she said outside the courtroom moments after the sentence was read. She has filed for divorce.

Dietrich's mother and brother and two of his friends — who testified on his behalf and said they would house and employ Dietrich if the judge spared him a prison sentence — left the courthouse without comment.

Dietrich, a tall, thin man with gray hair, pleaded with Judge Fortkort to sentence him to therapy instead of prison, saying he wants help "desperately."

"I knew there was a problem," Dietrich said before his sentencing as two mothers of victims choked back tears. "I tried to stop myself."

He apologized for the pain and suffering he caused.

Defense attorney Stephen Armstrong asked Judge Fortkort to continue the case for six months, during which Dietrich would remain in the county jail and undergo intensive therapy.

"If we don't treat pedophiles... they come out 10 times more vicious than when they went in," Mr. Armstrong told the judge.

But Assistant Commonwealth's

Attorney Tonya Robinson asked for the maximum penalty, saying Dietrich "knew he had a problem, yet he sought children out. He preys on the very young and the very innocent. He's every parent's nightmare."

The father of one victim took the stand to say how difficult the incident has been for his 4-year-old daughter.

"His actions assaulted not only our 4-year-old daughter, but our whole family," the father said.

Dietrich was convicted on similar charges in Montgomery County six years ago but was not sent to prison. He voluntarily sought help twice before the incidents at Luskin's, checking himself into hospitals. But he was unable to get treatment when his insurance rejected his claims, he said.

A psychologist testifying on Dietrich's behalf said the pedophile should undergo therapy and be placed on drugs to reduce his sexual drive.

"Prison does everything to make the pedophile worse," Jerome G. Miller testified. "Therapy would be much more productive."

But Ms. Fulmer said therapy would do no good.

"If it wasn't for his wife, he'd still be doing it," she said, shaking her head. "There's no rehabilitating him."