

# THE JOURNAL

FAIRFAX

Fairfax County's daily newspaper

FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

## Vienna man guilty of molesting 6 girls

BY LINDA LANTOR  
*Journal staff writer*

A Vienna man pleaded guilty last month in Page County Circuit Court to sexually abusing six young Fairfax County girls at his weekend retreat near the Blue Ridge Mountains between June 1983 and May 1986.

World Bank engineer Richard Nigel Middleton, 47, pleaded guilty on Sept. 19 to nine counts of aggravated sexual battery.

Other possible charges will not be pursued by either Fairfax County or Page County prosecutors, according to a plea-bargain agreement filed in Page County Circuit Court.

Middleton is free on \$20,000 bond until his Nov. 18 sentencing before Judge Joshua L. Robinson in Luray, the Page County seat. A World Bank spokesman said that the British-born water supply expert has taken leave from his job.

Middleton's attorney, Linda J. Ravdin, declined comment on why her client changed his original plea

of not guilty to guilty. She said Middleton, whose address is listed as the 1700 block of Palm Springs Drive, is seeking psychiatric help.

The two-year saga of sexual abuse at the renovated barn on 15 grassy acres near Luray began to unravel in June of this year when one of the victims saw a puppet show at the church she attends called "The Kids on the Block."

The show's characters urge children to tell someone if they have been sexually abused. After the show, the girl told friends and a teacher what happened to her, according to a Virginia State Police document. State police handled the investigation because it crossed county lines.

Page County commonwealth's attorney John T. Hennessy said that an investigation was launched after a complaint was made to the Fairfax County Department of Social Services. At least three of the girls involved are between ages 10 and 12.

When state police searched the barn last June, officers found "one guest register containing the names of juvenile females who were victims of sexual battery," said the affidavit for the search warrant filed in Page County.

Hennessy said he was pleased with the plea-bargain agreement because "we did not have to put them (the children) on the stand and have them testify about these tragic events in their very young lives."

He declined comment on what sort of sentence he would request for Middleton.

Fairfax County agreed to the plea bargain partly because it was unlikely that Middleton would receive an additional sentence if convicted of further charges in Fairfax County, said Corrine Magee, assistant Fairfax County commonwealth's attorney.

In addition, she said, one of the victims of abuse said to have occurred in Fairfax County was rebuc-

tant to testify.

Two of the parents of abuse victims declined comment. However, the mother of the grade-schooler who saw the puppet show agreed to be interviewed because she said she wants to alert parents to the warning signs of sexual abuse.

The girl's mother said she was struck by how unusual it was that Middleton, rather than his wife, would call to make arrangements for the weekend trips.

The woman said she told her daughter that what happened was not her fault, and that she still had power to influence the way the case would turn out by telling the police everything.

She praised state police and social workers for their sensitivity in handling the investigation.

As for Middleton, the woman said she does not strongly want to see him go to jail, but "I wish for him never to be in a position where he could ever do this again."