

Housing runaway girl costly

By **KIM PASKORZ**
Eagle Staff Writer

A Butler woman was sentenced Wednesday to 18 months of probation for knowingly housing her son's underage, runaway girlfriend.

A jury convicted Gail Swartzlander of corruption of minors, but the 54-year-old widow told Butler County Judge George Hancher her punishment runs much deeper than the courts could ever impose.

A registered nurse for more than three decades, Swartzlander said her license was revoked due to the conviction.

"I lost my self esteem. I lost my job, my financial security," Swartzlander said. "I almost lost my life."

Swartzlander said she has sought psychiatric counseling since the case against her, as well as related cases against her sons Richard and Daniel began. Compassionate is the word

Woman: Case ruined her life

numerous character witnesses, including neighbors and co-workers, used to describe Swartzlander.

Swartzlander said, to this day, she still doesn't understand the charge against her.

Prosecutor Jerry Cassidy said the conviction stems from Swartzlander's acts in fostering an illegal relationship decision by her older son.

Court records indicate Richard Swartzlander, then 20, had been dating the 15-year-old girl when her parents reported her missing.

The girl's parents were angry about the relationship, and the couple had been warned to put a stop to it, court records indicate.

When the girl failed to show up at school, police found her at

the Swartzlanders' home. The girl told police that both mother and son knew she was in the house yet did not contact police.

Prosecutors withdrew a similar corruption case against the son after he pleaded guilty to statutory sexual assault.

Richard Swartzlander III was sentenced in March to 11½ to 23 months in the county prison, but was immediately paroled on the time he already had served. He also received 24 months of probation.

While in jail, he was accused

of conspiring with another inmate to kill two state troopers, one of whom was his uncle.

However, a jury believed Richard Swartzlander's testimony that he really did not intend to kill the men and acquitted him.

His younger brother, Daniel, also was acquitted by a different jury of intimidating a witness in relation to the case involving the runaway girl.

Both sons were among the friends and family members who accompanied Gail Swartzlander to court Wednesday.

In addition to the probation, Gail Swartzlander was ordered to pay a \$500 fine and do 75 hours of community service.

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Man gets prison in botched arson

By **KIM PASKORZ**
Eagle Staff Writer

A Summit Township man who botched an attempt to burn down his ex-girlfriend's house while the woman and her new beau were inside will spend up to 30 months in state prison.

Jeffrey Kirk, 45, of Rustic Ridge Lane apologized for his actions and showed Butler County Judge George Hancher a decorative coin commemorating his 11 months of sobriety.

"I wish I could live that day over," Kirk told the judge, who sentenced him to serve between 9 and 30 months in prison.

Kirk, apparently jealous of Donna Oesterling's new relationship with Curtis Boal, abandoned his arson plan and ran when the couple spotted him outside their Clearfield Township mobile home about 9:30 p.m. on July 18, 2004.

Kirk, who had already pulled some skirting from the trailer, left behind a 12-ounce plastic cup filled with gasoline and two beer can boxes crammed with newspapers and Kirk's banking and insurance statements.

Kirk told the judge that, since that day, he has entered a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program and completed a course on emotional management at the Irene Stacy Community Mental Health Center.

But still the judge questioned the leniency of the deal the defendant cut with the Butler County District Attorney's office.

Kirk, who pleaded guilty to aggravated assault, originally had been charged with arson and causing or risking a catastrophe and multiple other charges.

Kirk's sentence is acceptable, but on the low end, for a felonious aggravated assault conviction.

Assistant District Attorney Jerry Cassidy told the judge that prosecutors were satisfied with the deal because it called for a sentence in state prison. Kirk has no prior record, and the victims gave the deal their blessing.

Boal and Oesterling, seated in the courtroom, acknowledged Cassidy's comments but made no statements.

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