

Ex-disc jockey admits to molestation counts

By RITA MUNZENRIDER
Of the Gazette Staff

A former broadcaster for a local Christian radio station admitted Thursday that he molested six girls who ranged in age from 4 to 14.

Tom Speed, 35, pleaded guilty to six felony charges of sexual assault against the victims. Speed was accused of fondling the girls inside and outside of their clothing while they were at his home for either day care or piano lessons, according to an affidavit filed by Chief Deputy County Attorney Daniel Schwarz.

The sexual offenses were committed between 1989 and spring of 1991, when the conduct was brought to the attention of the Billings Police Department by the victims' families.

Speed worked as a disc jockey and program manager for KURL-AM radio in Billings until May 1991. In November 1990, local listeners voted Speed the Billings-area radio hero in a contest sponsored by the Gazette. With 27,599 votes, Speed proved twice as popular as the second-place winner.

During the brief change of plea hearing before District Judge G.

Todd Baugh on Thursday, Speed went through each count, giving the age and initials of each victim and admitting that he had sexual relations with them. Speed said his conduct was for his sexual gratification.

Schwarz said he will recommend a prison term of 10 years with the final five years suspended when District Judge William Speare imposes judgment next month. Defense lawyer, Joseph A. Zavaletta, whom Speed hired to represent him, intends to argue for probation.

Baugh, however, warned Speed that the plea negotiations are not binding on the court, and that the maximum penalty possible for the offenses is 120 years. The judge set Feb. 19 for sentencing, but Zavaletta indicated that the date might be changed because he wants a formal hearing to argue for probation instead of prison.

Meanwhile, Speed will be free on his own recognizance, as he's been since he was charged with the sexual offenses last August.

All of Speed's victims were incapable of consent because they were under age.

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lindsey_mysse
Tue, Apr 2, 2019