

LITIGATION WEEK

Mo. man's lottery winnings to go to victim

A ST. LOUIS circuit court judge has ordered a man to hand over his Missouri lottery winnings to a girl whom he sexually assaulted in 1992.

The man, Thomas Bisso, has eight payments remaining of the 20 annual installments of \$133,000 he started receiving in 1989, said the girl's lead lawyer, Stephen H. Ringkamp, a partner at the Hulverson Law Firm in St. Louis.

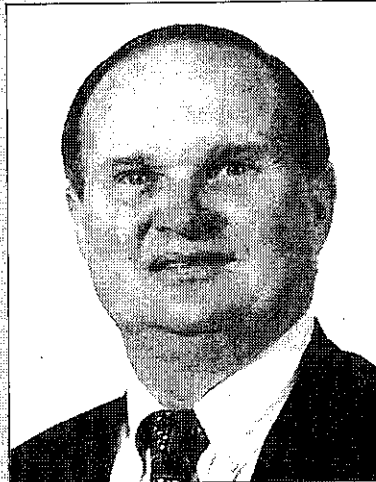
After a civil bench trial, at which neither Mr. Bisso nor his lawyer, Robert DeVoto, appeared, Judge Philip J. Sweeney found Mr. Bisso civilly liable for the assault and issued a \$2.5 million judgment, including \$1 million in punitive damages.

The judge ordered the balance of the lottery payments, about \$1.06 million, to go to the plaintiff, Mr. Ringkamp said. *M. W. v. Bisso*, No. 99CC-724.

Mr. DeVoto did not return two calls.

Under Missouri law, lottery proceeds may not be reassigned without a court order, Mr. Ringkamp said. That provision is to protect lottery winners from becoming victims of cheats, he said.

The defendant, who was a friend of the victim's mother, pleaded guilty to sodomy in 1994 and served a few months



Transfer of wealth: Stephen H. Ringkamp and Bret M. Rich represented the girl, who will receive about \$1 million in lottery winnings.

of a five-year sentence, said Bret M. Rich, a St. Louis solo practitioner who also represents the girl and her family.

The girl, almost 6 when she was assaulted, had been left alone with the defendant for about 20 minutes while her parents went to get her some ice cream.

In a deposition, the defendant said that he used a "monster" game to make sexual contact with the girl, who is now a teen-ager, said Mr. Rich.

The girl developed behavioral problems and finally told her mother what happened, he said. State officials and police concluded that the claim was credible, he said.

Winning the civil case is "the first positive thing that's happened to this little girl," said Mr. Rich. Other than the lottery payments, the defendant has no assets, he said. As fate had it, the reason he won the lottery was "to take care of this little girl," Mr. Ringkamp said.

After receiving "token" settlement offers, Mr. Rich said, he brought in the better-known Hulverson firm. In the end, it took only a morning-long, one-sided trial to win the large verdict. "My usual is a lengthy products liability or medical malpractice trial," Mr. Ringkamp said.

— EMILY HELLER