

\$750,000 Awarded For Strip-Search By Sheriff's Dept.

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A federal jury yesterday awarded \$750,000 in civil damages to a

Prostitute woman who was strip-searched without justification by the San Francisco Sheriff's Department.

The U.S. District Court jury not only awarded Victoria Schneider \$750,000 for the pain and suffering and emotional distress she had suffered, but also imposed an individual damages judgment against the deputy who ordered the search.

Schneider, who spoke with members of the jury after the verdict was announced, said she was elated at the verdict.

"I feel that justice has finally been done, and am so happy that someone finally believed my story," she said.

The strip search took place in June 1997 when Schneider, a post-operative transsexual, was arrested for solicitation of prostitution by a San Francisco vice squad officer.

The officer who arrested her identified Schneider as a male on her arrest paperwork, although the notation was later changed to female. When Schneider was delivered to City Jail for booking, deputies there expressed confusion about how to book her.

Although Schneider told them that a check of her criminal history records show she was female, she was taken into a male holding cell and subjected to a strip search by a female deputy while other jail staffers laughed and joked. She was later housed with other female prisoners.

During the trial, Deputy Fred Lew claimed he ordered the search because Schneider's rap sheet indicated she had previously been arrested for using drugs.

Lew's story was contradicted by the vice officer who arrested Schneider, who said she was not suspected of holding any drugs or other contraband at the time she was arrested.

Clarence said a check of the state's criminal history computer showed that nobody had made an inquiry about Schneider's previous arrests on the night in question. She indicated that Lew's story had been made up after the fact in order to excuse the search.