

# Jury's verdict brings relief for parents

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Fifteen months of prayers and worries came to an end yesterday for the friends and family of Jennifer Schweiger, when the jury forewoman stood up and said Andrew Rand was guilty of kidnapping the girl last summer.

Kenneth Schweiger clutched his wife's hand, and volunteer searchers, tears streaming, dashed to public telephones to put out word of the partial verdict.

"For the first time, I feel like I can sit here and not worry," Schweiger said as the excitement abated. "I used to go to bed wondering what may have been overlooked, what could be done to help the case."

For the first time since the start of the trial, a smile crossed the father's face.

"I'm glad we got this part," Karen Schweiger said moments later, outside the courtroom. "It feels so strange. Outside you're here, but inside you're kind of floating."

As word of the verdict flashed across Staten Island, people who spent days fighting heat and frustration a summer ago in a determined search for the 12-year-old Down's syndrome girl expressed

relief and satisfaction.

"My father and mother are relieved that it's over and that Jennifer's family can rest," said Linda Kramer, whose father, George, discovered the missing child's shallow grave Aug. 12, 1987.

After the jury was sequestered for another night to continue deliberating, the Schweigers, the detectives involved with the case and attorneys from the district attorney's office flooded the Terrace Grille on Richmond Terrace in St. George for an impromptu celebration.

"We've gone 15 months without an incident of this kind on Staten Island," District Attorney William Murphy said while speaking with the Schweigers. "And I think that says the arrest was the right one. Now we can look forward to 25 years without such (unsolved missing children cases)."

Rand faces up to 25 years to life for the kidnapping conviction.

Murphy shook Schweiger's hand, thanking the father and mother for being "cooperative and supportive" as Assistant District Attorney John Loughery and Detectives Ralph Aquino and Robert Jensen progressed with the prosecution of the case.

Loughery seemed highly taken aback at the applause and cheers that greeted him when he stepped into the bar.

"It was a team effort," Loughery said, turning toward Aquino, Jensen and the attorneys from his office. "For me, the people have won. The next verdict is important to the family, and that's very important."

"It's like you just won the seventh game of the World Series," said Jensen, whose spent countless months working on the case since July of last year, when it began. "And now, tomorrow you're going to play an exhibition game."

For the Schweigers, the verdict is the close of a tragic chapter in their lives and a chance for them to return to their new home in New Jersey and become a family again. The couple said that while they will be turning to the future with their 19-year-old son, Kenneth Jr., they will never forget the friends who came to help aid here on Staten Island.

"Without all those people, we never would have gotten through," Kenneth Schweiger said.

The Schweigers praised the jury, Loughery, the detectives and

searchers, and the many volunteers who participated in the search. "We can't thank everybody," he said.

They also expressed pleasure that the jury was returning today to finish its work and end their ordeal to bring Rand to justice.

Fran Auriti of Oakwood and Kathleen Lembo of Brooklyn, both volunteers from the search, still had imprints in their palms of the rosaries and crucifixes they held daily as the trial progressed. "I knew from the beginning (Jennifer) was going to be the one to make a difference," Mrs. Lembo said.

The Rev. Henry Gentile of Holy Family R.C. Church, Westerleigh, which acted as headquarters for the searchers during the search for Jennifer, was elated by the news.

"I'm just so happy," Father Gentile said during a telephone interview with the Advance. "I'm happy for Karen and Ken, and for all the children who will be safe from that man."

"This is like a dream come true," said Donna Cutugno, head of the volunteer group known as the Friends of Jennifer. "It's something I've waited for for so long."

While a feeling of victory coursed through those assembled last night, Detective Jensen voiced aloud the feelings of most of the celebrants when he noted, "It just doesn't seem like enough."



ADVANCE PHOTO/HILTON FLORES

Jennifer's parents, Kenneth and Karen Schweiger listen during court proceedings yesterday.