

Man on trial for kissing girl

A Battle Ground businessman is on trial this week, charged with french kissing an 11-year-old girl.

Thomas C. Eatinger, owner of The Stove Place, 813 W. Main St., was arrested in May. The girl told her father that Eatinger locked the front door of his store while she was there, then kissed her on the mouth. He is charged with indecent liberties.

Defense attorney Steve Thayer has asked Superior Court Judge Robert Harris for a ruling on whether french kissing falls under the indecent liberties statute.

The 11-year-old Yacont girl was the first witness in the case Monday. In words barely audible in the courtroom, she said she was wearing a T-shirt with the words "Hug me" on the front when she wandered into the store while waiting for her father to get off work.

"He asked if he could hug me. . . . He started kissin' me," she testified. "He put his tongue in my mouth."

She said Eatinger locked the front door of his store, then guided her to a back room, checking the lock on the back door on the way. He sat down in the room and told her to sit on his knee, she said.

Eatinger, 35, denies the charge. He is expected to take the stand later.

During opening statements, Thayer told the jury his client saw her T-shirt and asked her if he could hug her, gave her a hug and kiss, and told her she was cute.

Five days later, two police officers came to his shop and arrested him, said Thayer, without giving him a chance to give his side of the story. Eatinger has never been accused of a crime before, Thayer said, and members of his church will be called as witnesses to testify about his character.

While the jury was out of the courtroom for a time, Thayer called the case "probably the weakest case I've ever seen in my career."