

Connetquot faces suits in teacher sex abuse case

by Anthony J. Howard

The Connetquot School District and suspended teacher Clifford A. Reitz face potential lawsuits in connection with two alleged incidents of sexual misconduct by Reitz, one in June and another back in 1988.

Reitz, a Bohemia resident and 25-year teacher at the Bosti Elementary School, was charged by Suffolk County Police on September 13 with felony attempted sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. The charges stem from the alleged June 21 incident at the school in which a fifth grade female student said Reitz touched her thighs during an extra help math class.

Attorneys representing the unidentified 12-year-old student notified the district and Reitz in June that they intend to file a \$36 million lawsuit against them.

Garden City attorney Cary Goldinger said his firm is also representing the female student involved in the alleged 1988 incident. Goldinger has also served a notice of suit against Connetquot and Reitz in connection with that alleged incident, the attorney said Tuesday.

Reitz was arrested six years ago on two felony counts of allegedly sexually abusing two female students. One alleged

incident occurred in 1988, the other the year before. According to Drew Biondo, spokesman for the District Attorney's office, the charges were sent to a grand jury, who did not return charges. The case was dropped and the files sealed, Biondo said.

In a phone interview Tuesday, Goldinger referred to a third former student, who attended the school 20 years ago and has recently come forward to level similar charges at Reitz. "There has been a three decades-long history of harassing students and it's time it ended," Goldinger said.

According to Goldinger, in the June 21 incident the 12-year-old girl said she and another student went to Reitz for extra math help. While the other student sat nearby, the teacher allegedly touched her thigh and tried to force her legs apart. Goldinger said the other student witnessed the reported incident.

He also charged that the school district should have been aware of a teacher's alleged history of sexual misconduct. "When something like this happens over and over again, over a period of time such as this, something is remiss,"

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Goldinger said.

Paul Gianelli, Reitz' attorney in the criminal case, maintained his client's innocence and said again that he will be cleared of all charges. Gianelli said the family of the 12-year-old girl made the current allegations because they are looking for a financial settlement.

Connetquot Superintendent John Maloney declined to comment on the potential lawsuits. He did say, however, that the district has filed for a disciplinary hearing against Reitz. Known as a 30-20A proceeding under state law, the hearing will closely approximate a courtroom trial, Maloney said. The State Education Department-assigned arbitrator will determine if any sanctions, including termination, are warranted against Reitz.

The Connetquot Teachers Association will assign an attorney to represent Reitz at the 30-20A hearing, if the union's board of directors approves, CTA President Hooshang Parvin said.

Reitz has been suspended with pay by the school district. He appeared in court on September 20 and the case was adjourned for two weeks, at the District Attorney's request. Reitz, who is currently free on \$2,500 bail, faces a maximum of two-and a-third to-seven years in state prison if convicted on both charges. ■