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## Third Sexual Assault Suit Filed Against Lakeville Boarding School



A third former student of a prestigious boarding school in Lakeville has filed a federal lawsuit, alleging he was sexually assaulted by two teachers and a headmaster while he was enrolled in the 1980s and school officials were aware but did nothing to stop it.

The man who filed the suit says he was abused by staff members of at Indian Mountain School from 1980 to 1983 when, he was 12 to 15, according to the law firm representing him.

NBC Connecticut is not identifying the victim because of the sexual abuse allegations.

This is the third suit accusing the school -- for children in kindergarten through grade 9 -- of failing to stop teachers and the headmaster from “predatory sexual assaults and pedophilia” inflicted on minor boys, “including fellatio, anal sex, sodomy, voyeurism, fondling and forced masturbation,” according to attorneys for the plaintiff.

“The monstrous sexual abuse perpetrated by the school and its nest of child molesters inflicted torture and suffering on (name deleted) that began when he was a defenseless, innocent little boy, and that continues to this day,” said the man’s attorney, Antonio Ponvert III of Bridgeport-based Koskoff Koskoff & Bieder. “Like other Plaintiffs who filed complaints against the school last year, (name deleted) was subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation by the very adults who had pledged to protect him.”

The lawsuit accuses a former English teacher of sexually abusing, assaulting and exploiting dozens of boys at the school for more than a decade, taking photographs of the boys to blackmail them into silence and giving them marijuana, alcohol, cigarettes, cocaine and LSD.

The man who filed the suit fears photos that show him naked or partially dressed have been or will be published on kiddie porn sites and viewed by pedophiles around the world, according to the law firm.

The suit also claims the then-headmaster and several staff members knew what was happening and found hardcore child pornography in the English teacher’s possession. It also claims staff witnessed boys entering the teacher’s apartment after lights out and they saw him visiting dormitories late at night.

“Not one staff member, including the Headmaster, the Assistant Headmaster, the school’s staff psychiatrist, the school’s registered nurse, members of the school’s Board of Trustees, and even the school’s lawyer

– ever complied with mandatory child sexual abuse reporting laws,” Ponvert said in a statement. “Nor did anyone ever report Simonds’ possession of child pornography to the authorities, even though it clearly was against the law.”

The lawsuit also accuses the then-headmaster of rubbing cream all over the victim’s penis, claiming it was to treat jock itch, frequenting the boys’ showers and commenting on their penises and pubic hair.

The lawsuit accuses the then-French teacher of assaulting boys as well.

“Indian Mountain was charged with the wellbeing of its students in their parents’ absence,” Ponvert said in a statement. “These were vulnerable children who, instead of being protected by the adults they relied on, were subjected to unfathomable abuse. Not one adult at this institution came to their rescue.”

NBC Connecticut has reached out to the school.

When the last lawsuit was filed in January 2015, [Indian Mountain School's headmaster at the time](#), Mark A. Devey, responded with a statement promising to support its former students.

"Recently we notified our school community that we were conducting an investigation in order to identify any alumni who may have been victimized while a student at Indian Mountain School in the past. We believe that it is best for both the school and its alumni to deal with these issues now," Devey said in a statement. "It is heart wrenching to hear these allegations, and we are saddened by them. We will take the allegations very seriously, and we will support our alumni."

# Another Molestation Suit Filed Against Boarding School

*MEGAN SPICER, The Connecticut Law Tribune*

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A man claiming he endured sexual abuse as a student filed a federal lawsuit against Indian Mountain School in Lakeville on Thursday. It's the third such suit filed against the private boarding school in less than two years and the latest in a long line stretching back more than 20 years.

New York resident Matthew Bernstein says in his suit that he was sexually abused by teachers while a student at the private boarding school from 1980 to 1983. Much of his claims focus on Christopher Simonds, a teacher who has been named in the previous suits and was the subject of a 1992 State Police investigation.

"The abuse began when Matthew was just 12 years old, in grade seven, and continued through grades eight and nine," Bernstein's attorney Antonio Ponvert, of Koskoff, Koskoff & Bieder, said in a written statement. "For part of his eighth and ninth grade years, he was even assigned to live in the apartment of his primary abuser, English teacher Christopher Simonds."

Indian Mountain School is a private boarding and day school for students in prekindergarten through the ninth grade. Two other men sued the school in federal court, one last year and in 2014. Both allege that as students they were continuously sexually abused by school officials, and that school administrators were aware of it.

Peter Buck's case is set for trial in February 2017. William Brewster Brownville's has been stayed while the Connecticut Supreme Court hears a case centered on a law that extended the statute of limitations to 30 years. A number of similar lawsuits were filed in the 1990s and settled for undisclosed amounts.

Bradford Babbitt of Robinson + Cole, who is representing the school in the Brownville and Buck cases, could not be immediately reached for comment. School leaders [said in 2014](#) that they took the allegations seriously and were "committed to doing the right thing."

The most recent lawsuit, filed in federal court because Bernstein resides out of state, alleges that Simonds, reportedly now deceased, sexually abused, assaulted and exploited dozens of boys at the school for more than a decade, and that he took photographs of them to blackmail them into silence.

School staff witnessed boys entering Simonds' apartment after "lights out," and saw Simonds visiting the dormitories late at night. The school instituted a policy prohibiting faculty from visiting the boys after lights out, specifically to address Simonds' after-hours crimes, the suit alleges, but he flouted the rule and continued his visits.

The complaint states that Simonds showed his victims pornography, including child pornography, and routinely gave them marijuana, alcohol, cigarettes, cocaine and LSD. The suit claims that Simonds drove Bernstein to New York City to buy cocaine and heroin.

Simonds remained a teacher at the school despite the fact that former headmaster Peter Carleton and several staff members knew of his pedophilia, his molestation of children, and his possession of hardcore child pornography, the suit contends. It alleges that Carleton, also now deceased, took part in the sexual harassment and abuse.

Ponvert also represents Brownville, who claims that he and three other boys were forced to live in the basement of Carleton's on-campus home.

Ponvert said in his statement that Bernstein and Brownville were both abused by adults who had pledged to protect them. "The monstrous sexual abuse perpetrated by the school and its nest of child molesters inflicted torture and suffering on Matthew that began when he was a defenseless, innocent little boy, and that continues to this day," Ponvert said.

He said he doubts believes Bernstein's case will not be the last case brought against Indian Mountain School. "This can probably go on for a few more years."