

# 7 EX-STUDENTS SUE LAKE FOREST HIGH SCHOOL, CLAIM INACTION ON SEX ABUSE BY 2 TEACHERS



This is the theater building at Lake Forest High School that formerly was named for David Miller, one of two former teachers named in lawsuits filed Friday accusing them of sexual abusing students and the school of failing to do anything about them. BOB CHIARITO/FOR THE SUN-TIMES

**BY BOB CHIARITO**  
For the Sun-Times

In two federal lawsuits filed Friday, Lake Forest High School faces accusations that two former teachers sexually abused students.

The suits were filed in Chicago by seven former students against the school and Lake Forest Community High School District 115. One also names former Lake Forest High School driver's education teacher Cynthia Martin, and the other names former teacher David Miller as defendants.

The lawsuit accusing Miller says he targeted boys facing difficult circumstances at home to "groom and sexually abuse male students for nearly 35 years."

In the other suit, Martin is accused of "using her home and the provision of alcohol to sexually abuse a female student."

Both suits, which seek unspecified monetary damages, say school officials were aware of the allegations and did nothing.

Ian Alexander, the lawyer for the accusers, said that, although the statute of limitations for any possible criminal charges has passed, a judgment in their favor would provide justice and send a message to schools that sexual abuse can't be tolerated.

"The only way we can hold the school accountable is to do this," Alexander said.

A spokeswoman for Constance Collins, Lake Forest's interim school superintendent, wouldn't take questions Friday about the lawsuits. Instead, she responded with a written statement that quoted Collins as saying, "We have not yet seen the documents referenced but certainly take all reports of misconduct extremely seriously."

Martin said the accusations aren't true.

"I don't know why she's saying this," Martin said.

The woman suing her — who filed the lawsuit using only a first name, Sharon — spoke with a reporter on the condition she be identified only by that. She said Martin abused her from the fall of 1986 through the spring of 1988, after her father died, and her mother was in a psychiatric hospital.

Sharon said Martin had her over to her home, where they shared alcohol and marijuana before sex.

She said she didn't tell anyone.

"I felt special," the woman said. "She gave me beer and pot, but she'd also give me gifts and bought me clothes. And I just didn't have anyone to do that. It felt like, in a way, that someone was looking out for me."

Miller, who wouldn't comment, was a Lake Forest grad who worked there from 1966 to

2009 as a Spanish teacher, in the theater department and with the audiovisual program.

The school theater was named for him in 2002 — his name was removed last year because of abuse allegations, according to the suit.

Six people — three named, three filing under first names or as John Doe — are suing Miller, accusing him of abuse over more than three decades.



**Richard Wolfgram**

Richard Wolfgram, 50, one of the plaintiffs, says he started at Lake Forest in 1984 just two weeks after witnessing his father's suicide.

Of Miller, Wolfgram said: "I remember he taught me about the stages of grief. He was basically

trying to be like a therapist to me. But when we were together and no one was around, he was very physical. And it was a hug that, over time, became more physical, more intimate."

Another plaintiff also agreed to speak with a reporter, though on the condition that he would be identified only by his first name, Jonathan, as in the lawsuit. Now 59 and a financial analyst, he attended Lake Forest from 1975 to 1979.

According to the suit, he worked on a stage crew and attended a party Miller had at his home in the fall of 1978 or spring of 1979, when he was 16 or 17, and that he stayed after to clean up. The suit says Miller had him lie down and touched him "in a sexually inappropriate manner," and "similar encounters with Miller occurred on several other occasions before [he] graduated."

Jonathan said he didn't say anything about what happened until after returning as a college freshman to the school to edit a video he'd made. He said Miller tried to force a kiss on him. He said he then told his mother.

"The next day, she actually went to talk to the principal to say what had happened" but was told to leave things alone because Miller was an asset to the school, Jonathan said.

Michael de Koning, another of Miller's accusers, is 50 and an equities trader in Arizona. He said Miller's abuse crushed his dreams.

"I wanted to be a director when I grew up," de Koning said. "I wanted to be in the business. The moment that happened, all of that went away."

Another plaintiff — suing only as John and speaking on the condition of being identified by his first name — said he attended the school from 1976 to 1980 and Miller's abuse robbed him of his love for drawing.

"I used to draw a lot in high school," he said. "But, after this happened, I could not draw. It was too upsetting."



**Michael de Koning**