

## Federal jury clears retired Putnam Valley teacher in student sex-assault case

WHITE PLAINS — A federal jury has cleared a former Putnam Valley Middle School teacher of allegations in a civil lawsuit that he drugged and sexually assaulted a 12-year-old seventh-grader a decade ago.

The jury decided the lawsuit in favor of Dennis Tave, the 65-year-old former social studies teacher who was forced into retirement over the allegations. The Putnam Valley school district and middle school Principal Edward Hallisey were also defendants in the case.

The suit was filed by Laura Bliss, now 23, who charged that in January or February 2001, Tave slipped something in a drink he gave her during a classroom session to make up work after school hours. Bliss said she passed out and awoke to find that Tave had sexually assaulted her.

She made the allegations against Tave more than two years later in May 2003 when she told her parents and a therapist about the alleged incident. Her parents took her to the Putnam County Sheriff's Department where she filed a complaint against Tave.

The school district immediately suspended Tave when informed of the allegations by Tave and the sheriff's investigators. Tave retired over the summer of 2003 after 35 years as a teacher.

No criminal charges were ever filed against Tave, who always maintained his innocence. In 2008, the state Commission on Investigation criticized the sheriff's department's handling of the case. The state Education Department suspended Tave's teaching license in 2008, finding he had exercised "a serious lack of judgment" and "poor impulse control" on several occasions.

Bliss filed her federal lawsuit seeking \$17 million in December 2006.

During the week-long trial before U.S. District Judge Warren Eginton last week, Tave's lawyer, Stephen Santoro, accused Bliss of making up the story, saying she had told another student a similar story but said it was an unidentified male student who drugged her. On Friday afternoon, the

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jury voted 8-0 in favor of Tave, Hallisey, and the school district.

Gerry Carlin, the president of the Putnam Valley Federation of Teachers, said Tave's colleagues stood behind him from the time the allegations were first made.

"We are grateful that he has been exonerated by a group of his peers," Carlin said. "He will never get the last 10 years of his life back, but he can now move forward with everyone knowing he was completely innocent of these fraudulent allegations."

*Read more about this story Tuesday in The Journal News and on Lohud.com.*

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