

9/17/03 NORTH COUNTY NEWS Story:

PV teacher in limbo amid allegations

by Martin Wilbur

Two-year-old allegations of sexual misconduct by a teenage student against a Putnam Valley Middle School teacher have yet to be substantiated. After four months of investigating by the Putnam County Sheriff's Department and school district officials, neither entity has determined any wrongdoing on the part of veteran teacher Dennis Tave. Thomas Scapoli, an attorney for the Putnam Valley School District, said the probe into the 53-year-old Tave is ongoing and no decision has been made regarding his future.

The allegations of unlawful sexual conduct against Tave was reported to the Sheriff's Department in May, according to information released by the department in response to a July Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request submitted by the North County News.

A 15-year-old female student told investigators Tave engaged in sexual conduct with her while on school property when she was a 13-year-old seventh-grader, the document from the Sheriff's Department said. It gives no further details into the alleged incident. Captain William McNamara said the department has no new information to release but that Tave has not been charged with any criminal offense. Sources close to the district said Tave was brought into the Sheriff's Department offices for questioning during the first week of June. Repeated calls to the offices of Tave's attorney, Victor Grossman of Carmel, were not returned during the past three weeks. When reached by telephone at his Mahopac residence in July, Tave refused to respond to questions on two occasions.

District officials removed Tave from the classroom shortly after the student leveled the allegations, said Superintendent of Schools Gary Tutty. Tave has not been suspended, Tutty said, and has been receiving his full salary and benefits since the student's accusations were brought to the attention of the school district and police. A resolution to the matter had been expected before the start of the new school year.

As the criminal investigation unwinds, the school district has been conducting its own inquiry into the matter, said Scapoli. As of last Thursday, no conclusion has been reached, he said. Scapoli said the lengthy period of time since the accusations were leveled by the teen was not unusual in this type of case. "I don't think this has been an inordinate amount of time given the nature of the circumstances," he said.

Tutty confirmed yesterday (Tuesday) the district has made no decision. Tave has taught in the Putnam Valley School District for just over 30 years and was scheduled to retire at the end of the 2003-04 school year.