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Settlements reached in sex abuse lawsuits involving teacher

By **Bill Bird**
STAFF WRITER

Out-of-court settlements have been reached with three of seven men who filed lawsuits last year against the former employers of a Naperville School District 203 teacher they accused of sexually molesting them while they were preparatory school students in the 1980s.

Schaumburg attorney Joseph G. Klest represents four of the alleged victims. Klest confirmed Tuesday that settlements have been negotiated between two of his clients and the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Rome, the Roman Catholic religious order that operates De La Salle Institute in Chicago.

Klest declined to discuss financial terms of the agreements, which have been in negotiation since the fall.

He also would not identify his clients other than to say one is a Naperville man in his 30s and the other a Chicago-area man. The third man whose case was settled is represented by another attorney, Klest said.

The litigation also sought financial damages from Philip A. Cappelleri, who had been the plaintiffs' teacher and coach at De La Salle in the early and mid-1980s.

Cappelleri, 54, of Lisle has worked for District 203 for the past 12 years. He taught at both Jefferson and Madison junior high schools and was a physical-education instructor and coach at Jefferson.

District officials placed Cappelleri on paid administrative leave shortly after the lawsuits were filed in Cook County Circuit Court. Cappelleri has agreed to resign from the district at the end of the 2004-05 academic year.

Klest said his third client's lawsuit against the Brothers of the Christian Schools and De La Salle is "nearly settled," while the fourth man's case "is still in negotiations."


He declined to say whether Cappelleri participated in any of the settlements or remains a defendant in some or all of the litigation.

Attorney Jeffrey Anderson represents the third man whose case has

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been settled, as well as two other plaintiffs. An assistant said Tuesday by phone that Anderson was out of his St. Paul, Minn.-based office and unavailable for comment.

Ray Garza, Cappelleri's attorney, declined to comment Tuesday on the status of any of the lawsuits.

An official of De La Salle and District 203 attorney James P. Bartley did not return phone messages left Tuesday at their offices.

Three of the seven plaintiffs filed their lawsuits on Jan. 22, 2004, with each seeking a minimum of \$50,000 in damages. They included a man from Chicago's southwest side and two brothers from the suburbs.

All seven men accused Cappelleri of abusing them during the 1980s at various locations both on and off the grounds of De La Salle, at 3455 S. Wabash St. on Chicago's South Side.

Cappelleri worked as an administrator, teacher, baseball coach, football coach and trainer during his tenure there, according to the lawsuits. He then worked for Driscoll Catholic High School in Addison and Willowbrook High School in Villa Park before moving on to Naperville.

District 203 officials last fall conducted their own investigation of Cappelleri, finding "no evidence of misconduct" on his part during his tenure with the district.

Cappelleri has been reassigned to the district's human resources department. He will continue drawing his annual \$87,720 salary through the end of the school year, when he will leave the district.

Contact staff writer Bill Bird at wbird@scn1.com or (630) 416-5274.

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