



Haverhill shocked by sex charges against former library director; Howard Curtis due in court next week

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HAVERHILL — There was the public face of Howard Curtis, a soft-spoken former library director who helped boys become Eagle Scouts, raised money for charity and had a love of local history.

Then there was his alleged dark side, portrayed in civil and criminal court documents as a monster who preyed on young boys in Haverhill, sexually assaulting them repeatedly in public buildings.

The dichotomy surprises people who knew the man, who had deep roots in the city.

Dr. Arthur Bower, a local dentist and former city councilor for 24 years, said Curtis was his patient and he also knew him as the library director.

"He was always a fine, honorable gentleman that I knew," Bower said. "I did not know the other Howard Curtis."

Bower said he is surprised by the criminal charges.

"It's very unfortunate," Bower said. "If the allegations are correct, I feel very bad for everyone involved."

Curtis, 57, faces criminal rape charges, accused of molesting boys while he was a Boy Scout leader in Haverhill in the 1980s. He is scheduled for a pretrial hearing in Salem Superior Court Tuesday. Curtis' lawyer Joseph Griffin of Boston could not be reached for comment.

Curtis was indicted by a grand jury in June of last year and was arraigned in Salem Superior Court, where he pleaded not guilty Aug. 29.

He also faces a civil lawsuit filed by a 34-year-old Derry, N.H., man who alleges that Curtis molested him and other boys when he was a Boy Scout in the mid-1980s. The man, who grew up in Haverhill, is suing the city and the Boy Scouts of America. The lawsuit names three former Boy Scouts, among them the plaintiff, who say they were molested by Curtis in Haverhill.

William Klueber, former city auditor, was in the Rotary Club charitable organization with Curtis and remembers him as a man who participated in events to help others.

"He was a good Rotarian for a number of years," Klueber said.

Library Trustee Suzanne Davis would not comment about Curtis, except to say he was "a good friend." She

directed all questions to City Solicitor William Cox.

After resigning from the Haverhill library in 1996, he became director of the Corona, Calif., Public Library and resigned nine years later. Corona library officials did not return calls for comment.

Curtis has been moving from job to job during the last couple of years, as the charges against him emerged.

In January 2006, he was named director of the Beverly Library but refused the job three weeks later when questioned about allegations of child molestation.

Then in May that year, he was named director of the West Tisbury Free Public Library. He resigned less than 11 months later when confronted about his past by the Board of Trustees, according to the Martha's Vineyard Times, the local newspaper.

Court records state that Curtis now lives in Chilmark, a town on Martha's Vineyard.

The civil suit filed contained pages of allegations, including accusations that Curtis molested boys at two of Haverhill's most historic sites — Kimball Tavern in Bradford and at the birthplace of John Greenleaf Whittier.

The tavern is a historic building and part of the former Bradford College campus, and the Whittier Homestead is a museum dedicated to the poet and abolitionist who lived in the 1800s. Curtis lived in both places for a period of time as caretaker.

The man who filed the lawsuit against the Boy Scouts and the City of Haverhill is represented by lawyers Matthew Fogelman and Lisa Arrowood of Boston. Arrowood has said her client is seeking monetary compensation, and it will be up to a jury to decide what amount, if any, he should be awarded. The Eagle-Tribune is withholding the name of the man who filed the suit. The newspaper does not reveal the names of alleged victims of sex crimes.

Cox, the city solicitor, has said the man's lawyers asked the city for \$2.5 million in a letter to "avoid the expense and trauma litigation will exact on all parties."

The sexual abuse happened while Curtis, who was the city's library director from 1981 to 1996, was an assistant scoutmaster with the Boy Scouts, the lawsuit said. The victims were in his Boy Scout troop, according to court records.

Cox said Haverhill has filed a motion to dismiss the case against the city in Salem Superior Court for two reasons: the statute of limitations has expired and the allegations of misconduct happened outside the scope of his employment. The motion to dismiss will be heard Wednesday in Salem Superior Court.

Randy Larson, Scout executive for the Boy Scouts' Yankee Clipper Council, said there are few if any remaining people in his organization who have any knowledge of Curtis, and that the matter has been turned over to lawyers.

"I don't know a whole lot about Howard Curtis," Larson said. "The allegations go back nearly 20 years."

Howard Curtis' history

Grew up in Haverhill

June 1974 to July 1981: Haverhill Public Library worker, started as senior page, worked his way up to librarian.

July 1981: Named acting director of Haverhill library.

August 1981: Named library director.

June 16, 1996: Resigned from the library to become director of the Corona, Calif., Public Library.

June 2005: Resigned from the Corona library.

Jan. 2006: Named director of Beverly library, but refused the offer weeks later.

May 2006: Named director of the West Tisbury Free Public Library on Martha's Vineyard.

April 2007: Resigned from the West Tisbury job.

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