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# Teacher sex scandal alleged

60 Nevada high school girls may have been seduced since '77

By Michelle DeArmond  
Associated Press

PAHRUMP, Nev. — Terry Miller, a mother of four, heard the rumors shortly after moving here 12 years ago. Her aerobics teacher said she was divorcing her husband — a high school business teacher and athletic coach — after finding him in bed with a female student.

Miller reported it to the Pah-rump Valley High School principal, and told three principals over the years about similar rumors, but they said it was "hearsay and gossip" and nothing could be done unless one of the many alleged victims complained.

Incredulous at their inaction and worried about her teenage daughter's safety, Miller set out to find victims who would make a report.

"I knew that there were victims out there, that I could find a victim and get them to come forward, and by God's grace it just all came together," said Miller, a substitute kindergarten teacher. "The earliest victim I found was a 1977 graduate, and the latest victim was a 1994 graduate, and I encouraged them to come forward."

Two weeks ago, Joseph "Pete" Peterson was arrested on three counts of sexual assault against one former student, but those charges may be just the beginning — since the arrest, police have interviewed more than 60 women with similar stories covering Peterson's nearly 20 years here.

"It's like a domino effect," said Wade Lieseke Jr., Nye County sheriff in this rural town of 1,300 about 65 miles west of Las Vegas. "One came forward and the rest of them found courage in that."

"The sad part of this is ... that we contact people and it's very obvious in talking with them ... that something happened but

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Nye County sheriff

they don't want to talk about it," Lieseke said. "Some of these people are leading private lives and they don't want whatever occurred between Mr. Peterson and them to see the light of day."

Peterson's attorney, Peter Alpert, declined to let his client comment. The attorney said Thursday that he knew little about the case, having taken it only a week before, and would not comment.

"What she (the victim) is claiming is that during the time she was attending school, three nights a week she would stay after for night school — which he taught — and each night that she stayed after he would have sex with her," said Scott Huggins, a sheriff's investigator.

Peterson allegedly coerced the women into having sex with him by buying them flowers, clothes and jewelry, taking them on trips, giving or loaning them money or threatening them with bad grades, investigators said.

"The girls that he picked on were the girls that needed extra attention anyway," Miller said. "Girls that were from single-parent homes or didn't live with their parents at all. He knew how to pick them."

"It's the ones that were either financially deprived or their parents were very strict or strenu-

ous," said Doug Richards, a sheriff's investigator.

"He's very good at the manipulation, at making them think that he truly cared about them," Miller said.

"Some of the kids didn't know it was sexual assault," Huggins said.

School officials admit they heard the rumors, but contend they could not do anything.

"I told them (parents) ... we cannot do anything unless somebody speaks up," said Principal Ron Eason.

Eason said Peterson, who has been suspended with pay pending the outcome of his trial, is missed.

Peterson coached volleyball, softball and girls and boys basketball, and served as yearbook and senior class adviser at this school. Eason said Peterson frequently paid for the school's film and computer expenses.