

Caregiver accused of deviate conduct

Manager at Valpo home
for developmentally
disabled boys arrested

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VALPARAISO | A man who managed a Valparaiso group home for developmentally disabled boys was charged Wednesday with sexually assaulting one of the young men under his care, and court documents state he is suspected of victimizing others.

Michael Ritchie, 57, of 931 Hampton Court, Valparaiso, was charged with criminal deviate conduct and sexual battery. He was arrested Wednesday afternoon. He faces up to 23 years in prison if convicted of the felony charges.

Ritchie is accused of fondling and performing other sex acts on a 20-year-old man with Down syndrome who lived at the

group home. The home, operated by InPact Inc., is in the 3100 block of Heavilin Road.

An InPact spokesman was not available for comment, but Porter County police Maj. Steve Lawrence said he believes Ritchie has been moved to an administrative position and no longer has direct contact with clients.

Court documents state police began investigating in July when the grandmother of the 20-year-old man told police her grandson stated Ritchie performed a sex act on him.

The grandmother stated her grandson was a resident of the home from 2004 to July 2009, during which time she became uncomfortable with Ritchie taking boys on trips and doing other things without other caregivers being present.

Police spoke to the grandson and he stated he and another resident of the group home played "Santa Claus" — the name that was used for the sex act — in Ritchie's office. The grandson told police he told a staff member about the game,

but she just told him to sit on the couch.

Ritchie told police he worked with InPact for 20 years — managing a group home for five males ages 15 to 20 — and also volunteers with Special Olympics, but he denied anything sexual occurred.

However, police said their investigation showed Ritchie had a Web site with photo albums of small boys, many wearing only underwear or swimsuits. Porter County police said they uncovered numerous reports in which Ritchie was accused of molesting young boys with learning disabilities, including one report made to Valparaiso police and two made to Indiana State Police.

Police said they asked Ritchie about the allegations, and he further stated he resigned from his job as a teacher in Lake Village after being accused of groping a boy, and he stated he left the Lake Central school system after he was accused of inappropriately touching a child there. He also told police he got drunk and may have fondled his stepson.

Lake Central's director of human resources, Dr. Lawrence Veracco, con-

firmed Ritchie worked there as a substitute teacher at one time.

North Newton School Corp. Superintendent Brian Smith confirmed that Ritchie worked as a full-time teacher at Lake Village Elementary and was dismissed after the 1987-88 school year after he was accused of inappropriately touching a student. Smith said information was turned over to local police, but criminal charges were not pursued.

Ritchie told police he has sexual fantasies about young boys — including those residing with him — but he said he can control himself and continue to work with children. He told police his romantic fantasies make him work harder to take care of boys.

Lawrence said police are investigating the possibility there are more victims. Police are asking anyone else who had inappropriate contact with Ritchie to call Detective Sgt. Steve Rose at (219) 477-3134.

Porter County Editor John Scheibel contributed to this report.

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