

Lawsuit: Scouts didn't stop molester

Alleged victim cites once-secret documents about abusive leaders

By Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO — A man who says he was molested by a scout leader when he was 10 is suing the Boy Scouts of America and the Chicago Area Council, claiming they knew for years that the leader had a record of assaulting boys yet failed to keep him out of scouting.

The lawsuit by "John Doe" cites once-private files released in October detailing alleged child abuse by more than 1,200 scoutmasters and other volunteers across the country. Among those named in the files was Thomas Hacker, convicted in 1989 of sexually assaulting three boys while a Boy Scout leader in the south Chicago suburbs.

The lawsuit contends the Boy Scouts organization was aware as far back as 1970 that Hacker was

molesting scouts, yet failed to keep him from later volunteering for scout work in Illinois, where he allegedly molested John Doe in 1985.

It wasn't until the files were released that John Doe "discovered that he was repressing the memories of his abuse," the lawsuit states. The alleged abuse occurred "on routine occasions during, before or after various scouting activities," according to the lawsuit, filed Tuesday in Cook County.

"What the scout and his parents didn't know, and couldn't have known, was that his scoutmaster was already a convicted pedophile who had been banned from scouting in Indiana," attorney Chris Hurley said in a statement. "While the Boy Scouts of America was promoting the wholesomeness of its programs, and its moral and safe environment, for decades it was secretly removing scoutmasters for child sexual abuse at an alarming rate.

"Unfortunately, once removed, many of them managed to sneak back in and continue victimizing boys," he added.

Citing the files released in October, the lawsuit notes that Hacker became a scoutmaster with the Northwest Suburban Council in Illinois within a year after he was thrown out of scouting in Indiana.

"By late 1971, the Boy Scouts of America learned that Hacker had again been arrested on charges of taking indecent liberties with a child," Hurley said. "A BSA official indicated that 'under no circumstances do we want (Hacker) registered in scouting.' Yet sure enough, Hacker resurfaced as a committee chairman and scoutmaster in the Chicago Area Council in 1983 or 1984."

Deron Smith, a spokesman for the Boy Scouts of America, released a statement saying "any instance of child victimization or abuse is intolerable and unacceptable."

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