

2 GUILTY IN SEX ABUSE

Shirley teens admit to sodomy of disabled man in bowling alley's bathroom, facing 18 years or more in prison

Newsday - Long Island, N.Y.
Author: ALFONSO A. CASTILLO
Date: Sep 26, 2007
Copyright Newsday Inc., 2007

Two Shirley teens pleaded guilty yesterday to the "horrific" sexual assault of a developmentally disabled man whom they sodomized with a plumbing tool, Suffolk prosecutors said. Both will serve at least 18 years in prison.

Steven Rodriguez, 19, pleaded guilty to attempted predatory sexual assault and aggravated sexual abuse in exchange for a promised sentence of 20 years in prison. His codefendant, Michael Lunsford, 18, pleaded guilty to first-degree assault in exchange for a sentence of 18 years.

State Supreme Court Justice Robert W. Doyle will sentence both teens on Oct. 23. Each faced a maximum of 25 years to life in prison. Newsday is not naming the victim, 20, because he was the victim of a sex crime.

John Scott Prudenti, deputy chief of major crimes for the Suffolk district attorney's office, said he met with the parents of the victim shortly after the pleas were entered, and that they were "in total agreement and supportive" of the deal.

"There's no sentence that will ever be sufficient for what their child went through," Prudenti said. "But they rightly pointed out that it would have been hard to imagine anyone going through this and having to testify, let alone a developmentally disabled person."

During questioning by Assistant District Attorney Kate Wagner, Lunsford admitted that last October he held down the victim in the bathroom of a Shirley bowling alley where the victim worked. Rodriguez later admitted that he got a plumbing snake from a utility closet and inserted it in the victim's rectum.

The victim suffered serious internal injuries and required surgery to have the tool removed, Prudenti said. He has since largely recovered, and has found a new job, Prudenti said.

Lunsford concluded that pleading guilty "was in his best interest," said his lawyer, Thomas Foy of Lake Grove.

Rodriguez' attorney, Michael Brown, of Central Islip, said his client is "clearly remorseful. ... He wishes he could turn back the hands of time and reverse the harm and damage that was done to this victim," Brown said.

CORRECTION: A story yesterday incorrectly reported the negotiated prison sentence for Michael Lunsford, one of two Shirley teens who pleaded guilty in the sexual attack of a developmentally disabled man. Lunsford is expected to be sentenced to 16 years in prison. PG. A19 ALL 9/27/07