

## Ex-teacher acquitted in abuse case

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A former Bay Shore Middle School music teacher accused of fondling two students has been acquitted in one case, a year after he was convicted in the other.

Richard Tuthill, 36, was accused in 2005 of touching two 13-year-old girls in separate incidents during private voice lessons at his home.

A jury on Monday acquitted Tuthill on two counts of second-degree sexual abuse after a three-week trial that included seven days of deliberations. He faced a maximum sentence of a year in jail for the misdemeanor charges.

"After three long years, a jury of his peers has finally restored Mr. Tuthill's good name," said his lawyer, Michael Brown of Central Islip. "He has gone through hell and back and can finally get on with his life."

Suffolk district attorney's office spokesman Robert Clifford declined to comment on the acquittal.

Last year, a jury found Tuthill guilty of second-degree sexual abuse, a charge that was the result of the first girl to accuse him. District Court Judge Toni Bean sentenced Tuthill to six months' probation and he was required to register as a sex offender. The case is being appealed.

Brown said the first student accused his client after she failed to get the lead role in the school play, which he said she "desperately wanted."

The second student made a copycat accusation in a bid to get attention from parents in the midst of a messy divorce, Brown said.

Tuthill, who has no prior criminal history, could not be reached for comment.