

Big Picture  Local Focus
Daily Herald
SUBURBAN CHICAGO'S INFORMATION SOURCE

Sex abuse story built on months of work and dozens of sources

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Work on the investigative piece we published Wednesday on Mark **Campobello** and the Rockford Diocese began in late 2003, but the idea for the story goes back to the very beginnings of the clergy sex abuse scandal.

After the October 2003 revelation that there was a second victim, this time at Aurora Central Catholic High School, the questions about who knew what and when began to intensify. Twice-stunned residents were asking for a full accounting, many directly appealing to us for help.

But the roots of the story go even deeper. Some of the seminal questions were formulated as reporter Garrett Ordower covered **Campobello's** arrest for the first victim in Geneva in 2002. This story proved to be the answer to those questions.

Still, in the last seven months, the story wound itself many ways. Our initial goal was simply to lay out a clear chronology of what happened. Under closer scrutiny though, the detail proved more tragic and the story expanded.

We were initially set to print it before the scheduled May trial of **Campobello**. But after he pleaded guilty in advance of the court date, the wheels came off this plan. At the same time, that opened many doors. Witnesses stepped forward unfettered. The first civil suit was filed. Documents previously unavailable went public. So, the last stretch of a seven-month marathon turned into a weeklong sprint.

A rough accounting of the reporting shows about two dozen people were interviewed, with many more contacted and given the opportunity to respond. There also was an additional 14 sources of published and legal documentation, a few of them lengthy. Plus all these sources overlapped - interviews were backed by the police investigation, which was supported by court documents. And not one person, ever, said the chronology of our story was flawed.

Despite this, I did not expect the response. Many of our sources painted an honest but unflattering picture of one of Geneva's more revered institutions struggling to deal with a terrible crisis. Given the weight of the story, my mood was frankly somber Wednesday. I was braced for the worst. And while there have been a few critics, we have taken dozens of supportive calls and e-mails, thanking us for the thoroughness of the story, telling us it will help the healing begin. On a divisive issue like this, there is no higher praise to a newspaper.

Helping the 'journey of healing':

A parishioner at local Catholic church has set up a post office box for anyone wishing to send correspondence to the two young women **Campobello** in May pleaded guilty to abusing. The organizer has asked that those interested send letters to "Journey of Healing" at P.O. Box 534, Geneva, IL 60134. Be sure to write who you are contacting on the envelope. Refer to the girl from St. Peter's School in Geneva as "Mary" and the girl from Aurora Central Catholic High School as "Ann." These are not their real names. If you feel comfortable, you can sign your name, but anonymous letters are just as good, I'm told.

A fond farewell:

As those who read her final column noticed, Denise Donavin, our Elburn columnist and reporter, is moving out of the area.

She started writing for us in 1998; her column began in January 2002. I will remember most her dedication. She would call me at home or work, day or night, if she felt there was anything important happening. And through her own contacts and initiative, she had a hand in many stories even when her byline wasn't on them.

Probably most emblematic is the morning of May 30. She was assigned to cover the Kaneland High School graduation ceremony. She had hurt her ankle earlier - broken it in fact, though she didn't know it yet - and still drove in from Michigan, attended and wrote about the event, and went home to bed. Only the next morning did she get treatment - and a cast.

The person charged with filling her shoes, or shoe I guess, will be Emily Jennings, an Elburn resident and former features editor for the Daily Herald. No, not ours, or the one in Morris. The one in Provo, Utah. The mother of four currently works as a public affairs specialist for a group of churches. Her column will debut Wednesday.

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