

Ware Shoals grads suing school district over Jill Moore's employment

By CHRIS TRAINOR/ Index-Journal staff writer

Thursday, June 26, 2008 12:34 AM EDT

A pair of former Ware Shoals High School students have filed lawsuits against Ware Shoals School District 51 and its board of trustees in relation to the district's employment of ex-cheerleading coach and guidance clerk Jill Moore.



The lawsuits were filed on behalf of the two WSHS graduates -- one a former cheerleader, the other a former Hornets' football player -- by Charleston attorney Lionel Lofton.

"This is a civil lawsuit being brought by two former Ware Shoals High School students," Lofton said Wednesday.

Each lawsuit levies four causes of action against the district and its board, including gross negligence, gross negligence in the hiring, supervision and retention of Moore, violation of the Public School Safety Act and breach of fiduciary duty.

Ware Shoals School District 51 superintendent Fay Sprouse declined comment on the matter Wednesday, deferring to attorney Duke Highfield, who is handling the matter for District 51.

"I have received the lawsuit and am in the process of preparing a response," said Highfield, who is also of Charleston.

Moore was arrested in January 2007 and charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor and providing alcohol to minors. She resigned following her arrest. Authorities accused her of providing cigarettes and alcohol to two then-16-year-old Hornets cheerleaders and putting them in an "incredibly inappropriate situation" regarding a sexual relationship Moore was reportedly having with a National Guardsman.

Two Guardsmen were disciplined by military officials for their role in the scandal.

Moore reportedly entered pre-trial intervention earlier this year, a process which, if completed, would expunge her record of any charges.

Moore's father, Marcus Bishop, was on the District 51 board at the time of her arrest and later resigned his position.

The two students levying the lawsuits are listed in the suit as Jane Doe and John Doe. Jane Doe was reportedly a minor during the timeframe laid out in the lawsuit.

However, John Doe was reportedly not a minor during the timeframe provided. A source close to the suit said John Doe is former Hornets' standout tailback Tony "Moon Pie" Lomax.

Lofton said the names of the former students involved will be divulged during the discovery portion of the suits.

The lawsuits allege that, during the years of 2005-07, Moore, acting within the scope of her employment at the high school, began inappropriately fraternizing with students, including, but not limited to, Jane Doe and Lomax.

The suits allege Moore, "began subjecting and exposing" the students to inappropriate and indecent activities and situations, including those related to alcohol, tobacco and sex during school hours, at school sponsored events and at other locations where Moore would take, meet or advise the students to be.

The suits allege that, between 2005 and 2007, school district employees or officials were, directly or through their agents, "put on notice" that Moore was engaging in inappropriate or grossly negligent conduct with students.

The suits allege that school officials "failed to act reasonably, proximately and directly," causing the two plaintiffs to suffer injuries and damages.

The first cause of action in the suits lays out more than 25 ways in which Lofton says the district was negligent or reckless in relation to the plaintiffs, including:

* Failing to have a program or system in place to account for the whereabouts of all students during school hours and after school hours while the students were on the premises.

*Grossly and negligently retaining unqualified and dangerous teachers, guidance counselors, coaches and/or employees after receiving actual and/or constructive notice of their harmful misconduct and dangerous behaviors.

*In employing personnel at Ware Shoals High School who did not know how to recognize improper fraternization between coaches and guidance counselors and students.

*Failing to train the principals, guidance counselors, teachers, coaches and other personnel on the subject of protecting students from sexual abusers or predators.

*Failing to monitor Moore's improper fraternization with students.

*Failing to comply with the S.C Safe Schools Act.

*Failing to train all school personnel to report any and all acts of possible grooming, sexual harassment or inappropriate conduct between employees and students.

Lofton said the defendants in the case will likely file an answer to the suit within 30-60 days. After that, it could be 12-18 months before the case goes to trial, unless there is a settlement beforehand.

Lofton is a former federal prosecutor in the United States Attorney's Office. In a previous case, he represented 17 students in Henderson County (N.C.) who were allegedly molested by a teaching assistant. In that case, the Henderson County school board settled for \$1.78 million.