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Suit alleges abuse by Scout leader 20 years ago

By John Christoffersen
Associated Press

STAMFORD — A former Boy Scout in a Stamford troop filed a lawsuit yesterday accusing his troop leader, who committed suicide last week, of sexually assaulting him more than 20 years ago while teaching self-defense and first aid.

The lawsuit was filed yesterday in state Superior Court in Stamford on behalf of Jay Trinidad, a 35-year-old Seattle man, against former Scout leader Bjarne Karlsen Jr. of Milford and the Boy Scouts of America.

Karlsen, 59, died last week after a drug overdose that was ruled a suicide, according to the state medical examiner's office. A relative who answered the phone at Karlsen's home declined to comment yesterday.

"We're definitely going ahead with the case," said Paul Slager, Trinidad's attorney. "The case is really about the Boy Scouts' responsibility and

accountability for Jay's sexual abuse by his adult Boy Scout troop leader."

A marshal last month served a complaint and summons about the allegations to Karlsen's home.

Louis Salute, executive of the Connecticut Yankee Council, which oversees the Scouts, said he was not familiar with the allegations in the lawsuit. He said the organization conducts background checks of troop leaders and has youth protection guidelines, such as not allowing adults to be alone with Scouts.

"Obviously, we take child abuse very seriously," Salute said.

Karlsen was a troop leader for about 10 years until about a decade ago, Salute said.

Trinidad agreed through his attorney to be identified. The Associated Press does not regularly identify alleged victims of sexual assault without their consent.

Slager said Trinidad filed the

lawsuit after years of therapy, during which he was suicidal at times.

"It had a profound and devastating impact on him and his life since it happened until today," Slager said. "He's at a place now in his life where he feels he has the strength and courage to go forward."

Trinidad was a Boy Scout with Rogers Troop in Stamford from 1981 to 1984 when Karlsen served as troop leader, according to the lawsuit. He accuses Karlsen of sexually assaulting him while teaching him to practice a first aid demonstration.

Karlsen also told Trinidad they would sleep alone together in the same tent during a two-night Scout camping trip, according to the lawsuit. Karlsen sexually assaulted Trinidad both nights, the lawsuit alleges.

Karlsen allegedly told Trinidad that he would provide self defense instruction to advance Trinidad's status in the

troop, according to the lawsuit, which claims that Karlsen led Trinidad into a deserted room in a building in Stamford and sexually assaulted him.

Immediately after the incident, Karlsen gave Trinidad merit badges and offered to promote him to a leadership position, the lawsuit alleges. Trinidad was 11 to 13 when he was allegedly sexually assaulted.

Slager said he was not aware of any other allegations of abuse.

"It raises concerns that what happened to Jay was allowed to happen to other children as well," Slager said. "Jay filed this case because he was looking for answers from the Boy Scouts about how they would allow an adult troop leader like Karlsen to be alone and unsupervised with a young boy like Jay for long periods of time, including sleeping with Jay in a tent for consecutive nights on an official Boy Scout camping trip."