

Ramapo: Gymnastics coach Joseph Lewin arrested on sexual abuse charges

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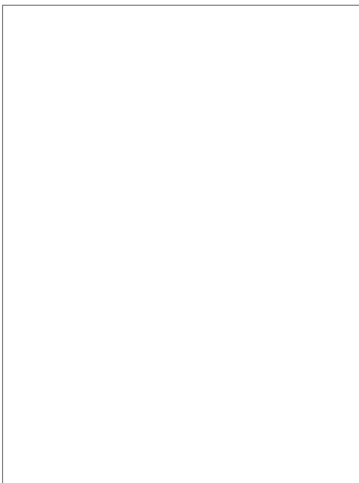


Joseph Lewin of Port Chester, also known as Joseph Lewandoski, is accused of sexually abusing children under 13 from 2001-2014. Seth Harrison, sharriso@lohud.com

RAMAPO - A 67-year-old gymnastics coach who trained children in gyms he owned in Hillburn and Suffern has been accused of sexually abusing at least five youngsters under 13 from 2001-2014, Ramapo police said Thursday.

Joseph Lewin of Port Chester, also known as Joseph Lewandoski, is charged with five counts of second-degree course of sexual conduct against a child and first-degree sexual abuse, both felonies, police said during a Thursday morning news conference at Police Headquarters.

"We're concerned there could be more victims," Detective Lt. Michael Colbath said, standing with Police Chief Brad Weidel and the lead investigators, Detectives Robert Fitzgerald and Jonathan Quinn.



Joseph Lewin of Port Chester (Photo: Ramapo police)

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Colbath said Lewin worked at a number of gymnastics places in Rockland County and possibly outside of New York. Suffern borders Hillburn and Mahwah, New Jersey.

The crimes Lewin is accused of committing took place at The Gym (also known as Joe's Gym) at 143 Route 59 in Hillburn; and The Gym at 7-11 Suffern Place in Suffern. Those gyms are no longer in business.

Police declined to reveal any details that could potentially help identify the people who claim to have been abused by Lewin. Colbath declined to release the gender of the survivors, where they are from or say whether there was physical evidence, such as emails or recordings.

"This is a very sensitive issue," Colbath said. "Hopefully, this will bring some closure for the victims."

The charges follow revelations by gymnasts discussing their sexual abuse by [Dr. Larry Nassar](#), the physician for the Olympic and Michigan State University teams.

Nassar has been sentenced to a maximum of 175 years in prison for abusing more than 160 girls and young women. He also faces a 60-year sentence for pornography crimes.

Weidel said he would be "speculating" to say the #MeToo movement and the Nassar case brought out Lewin's alleged survivors.

"We don't necessarily know what sparked them to tell people they trust and come to us," Weidel said.

One person came to Ramapo police about a month and half ago to talk about Lewin, Colbath said. From there, detectives were able to interview other survivors.

"There's a possibility there may be adult victims 16 and older, as well," he said. "We know it's a very sensitive topic" for people to come forward and discuss.

While police declined to name other gymnastic facilities where Lewin trained youngsters in tumbling, Lewin apparently worked with at the Mania Training Facility in Stony Point, according to a Facebook post by the business. The business suspended Lewin's access to its gymnastic facility after his arrest became public.

"This afternoon we were made aware of some allegations of misconduct against Joe Lewin, a tumbling instructor who utilized Mania Training Facility. Mania does not have any knowledge of the credibility of the allegations nor do we have any knowledge of the allegations by current or former Mania athletes or employees."

The business barred Lewin, saying, "Out of an abundance of caution we have suspended his access from Mania Training Facility as we place the safety and well-being of our athletes first."

Lewin has been released on \$10,000 bail after arraignment in Hillburn Village Court. Ramapo police were assisted by the county District Attorney's Office and Stony Point and Suffern police.

The charge of course of sexual conduct states that, over a period of at least three months, an adult older than 18 engages in two or more acts of sexual conduct with a child under 11.

First-degree sexual assault involves having sex with a child or a victim who is mentally incapacitated, mentally disabled or physically helpless.

Elizabeth Santiago, executive director for Center for Safety & Change, said people need to start believing the victims and survivors, not blaming them. She said one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused by the time they turn 18.

"We live in a society where the very people who are oppressed are the people we blame for the violence perpetrated against them," she said. "Instead of asking, 'Why did she wait to tell someone?' or 'Why does she stay?' we should be asking the single pertinent question: 'Why did he abuse her?'" she said.

Rockland District Attorney Thomas Zugibe said he didn't know why the victims came forward at this time, but he's glad they did. He said the case was reminiscent of the one involving the Olympic gymnasts in terms of the power coaches have.

"It's a sad commentary that people entrusted with your kids can act in this manner and get away with it for a protracted period of time," Zugibe said. "How do you protect your children, especially when you are doing what's best for them?"

Zugibe and the police encourage the public to contact them with any information at 845-357-2400.