

Scout leader's ouster draws mixed reaction

By Andrea Zentz
Milford Bureau Chief

MILFORD — A recent decision to banish a Boy Scout leader, convicted 18 years ago of molesting a teen-ager, has sparked a public outcry among some parents and Scouts who know the man. But others applauded the ouster.

Donald Fricke, 41, of Milford, was convicted in 1966 of fondling a Boy Scout when he was a Scoutmaster at Old Settler's Boy Scout Camp in Milford, court records say. The Quinnipiac Council asked for Fricke's resignation after learning of his criminal record two weeks ago.

Shirley Ellis, the mother of a Boy Scout in the Order of the Arrow, chastised the Boys Scouts of America for removing Fricke from the organization, and criticized the newspapers' account of the dismissal. Fricke worked with the boys in the Order of the Arrow, a Scouting honor program.

"Don told me the Scouting association lawyers said they would back him 100 percent," she said. "The parents were behind him 100 percent."

Ellis, of Milford, said she does not want her sons in an organization that goes back on its word. But one of her sons plans to remain a member, she added.

Ellis said Fricke always had provided encouragement for her son.

"My son came home in tears. Whoever is doing this is ruining him (Fricke)," she said.

She also chastised the newspaper's illustration of a Boy Scout hovering beneath a shadowy figure, saying she does not want her children to see it. "I think they'd be afraid because of the picture," she said.

Ellis said she is worried Fricke,

who is a maintenance worker for the city, will lose his job as a result of the publicity.

But she doubted other parents would push for his reinstatement.

"When it comes down to it, everyone says they are behind him, but no one wants to get involved," he said.

Her husband, Ernest Ellis Sr. agreed.

"Most people are too lazy," he said.

He commended Fricke's accomplishments in Boy Scouts.

"He has given his all to Scouting," he said. "He has done a lot of good for the kids in the city."

Ernest Ellis said it is unfair to make Fricke pay for a crime he committed years ago.

"This individual has made a complete about-face," he said. "You are now trying him again 19 years later."

"There are so many bad people out there, but you pick the tops," he added.

Boy Scout District Commissioner Rita Burke of West Haven,

however, characterized Fricke's banishment as just.

"I feel a bank robber gets a second chance, but I have seven kids," she said. "I'd like to lead the group of mothers who go after this guy or someone like him."

She praised the newspaper stories about Fricke and the screening process of volunteer organizations.

"If they (reporters) have facts, I want to see it blazed in the paper," she said. "And, I honestly feel there should be more scrutiny (in selecting volunteers)."

Edward Quirk, whose son is a member of the Order of the Arrow, also said the council correctly removed Fricke.

"His leadership makes parents question other leaders," he said. "Once convicted, a rule is a rule. He should not be in a responsible position with boys."

Quirk said the story probably never would have surfaced if the council had dealt with the problem.

"If the council leadership can't clean its own house, then the news-

paper has an obligation to print the story," he said. "If they had knowledge before your contacting them, they should have dealt with it instead of sweeping it under the rug."

Jane Platt, a parent of a Milford Boy Scout, said she has mixed feelings about the ouster. Fricke should be given another chance, she said, but she realizes that move would leave parents wondering whether there are other Scouting leaders with similar records.

She said the newspaper stories smacked of "muckraking," but that does not mean they should have been suppressed. She also faulted the story for having no real basis, since there was no current danger.

Richard Burdick of West Haven said the council should have handled the incident in confidence.

"I think both articles were untimely," he said, noting Boy Scouts of America celebrates its 75th anniversary Friday.

"It's Scouting week," said Burdick, a member of the Order of the Arrow. "This kind of gives them a black eye."

He accused the newspaper of sensationalizing the story.

"I don't think it's right," he said. "It's like a boy stealing a candy bar . . . x-amount of years ago . . . and there has been no repetition."

Two young members of the Order, Thomas Trower of Hamden and Michael Harold of Milford, said Fricke deserves a second chance.

"I think kids can have trust in him," Trower said. "But parents may not have trust in him."

Kenneth Prowse, council executive of the Quinnipiac Council in Hamden, refused to comment.