

# SPORTS

HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2022 SECTION C

## AN ABUSE OF TRUST

Gymnastics coach arrested after allegations of sexual impropriety that span decades

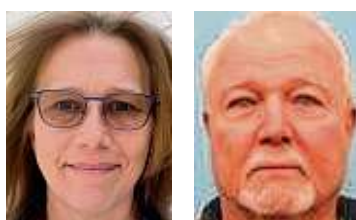
By Danielle Lerner  
STAFF WRITER

*Note: This story contains descriptions of sexual assault.*

Anne Elrod Whitney had only recently joined a girls gymnastics team at Rowland's Northwest when she was invited to attend a team sleepover at the gym's building in northwest Houston. It was 1983. She was 10. What should have been a safe,

fun-filled event in a familiar space instead became corrupted.

The sleepover had the atmosphere of a school lock-in with loosely organized games, sleeping bags splayed across the floor, and pizza ordered in for dinner. Kids played on the gym equipment normally reserved for rigorous instruction. Some people propped blue vinyl gym mats up against the wall to construct



Anne Whitney has detailed abuse by gymnastics coach Mike Spiller dating to 1983.

lean-to forts.

At some point, Whitney found herself alone in one of the forts with Mike Spiller, whom she knew as a charismatic man

and one of the gym's primary coaches, out of sight between the mats and the wall.

There, she says, Spiller snuggled with her on top of sleeping bags and began massaging her thighs and hip while commenting on her muscles. Then Spiller put his hand inside Whitney's underwear and massaged the outside of her vagina.

"I actually, at that time, didn't know anything bad had happened," says Whitney, who is now 49 and resides in Pennsylvania. "I think I liked to be somebody's favorite, you know?"

And I know now that's the thing that happens to a lot of kids where, you know, there's (seeking) approval in a relationship, and even affection, from somebody that you care about."

Nearly 40 years later, on Nov. 18 of this year, Spiller turned himself in after police in Boerne put out a warrant for his arrest, according to a law enforcement incident report. He was booked into the Kendall County jail, where he remains on a bond of \$100,000.

On Tuesday morning, a Ken-  
**Spiller continues on C4**

WORLD CUP: UNITED STATES 1, IRAN 0

## Americans move on with a fallen hero



Tim Nwachukwu/Getty Images

Weston McKennie, left, and Tyler Adams get wrapped up in the moment after Christian Pulisic scored for the U.S.

### Pulisic injured while scoring goal that earns spot in next round

By Andrew Das  
NEW YORK TIMES

DOHA, Qatar — The job for the U.S. soccer team was simple, really: win.

The stakes and the stage and the politics all made things harder going into their game against Iran on Tuesday night at the World Cup. The own goal by their federation's social media team, the Iranians' great umbrage at the perceived insult to their flag, the chatter and the threats and the intrigue all added to the spice of the matchup. But the task, at its heart, left no room for nuance at all: If United States wanted to keep playing in this tournament, it had to



Manu Fernandez/Associated Press

Christian Pulisic beats Iran's Alireza Beiranvand before crashing into the goalkeeper and suffering a pelvic injury.

#### UP NEXT

##### U.S. VS. NETHERLANDS

**When/where:** 9 a.m. Saturday at Al Rayyan, Qatar.

**TV:** Fox.

beat Iran.

And so it did.

The price of victory may be a high one: Christian Pulisic, perhaps the Americans' brightest star and the scorer of its only goal in a 1-0 victory, was forced from the game at halftime with an abdominal injury sustained when he crashed hard into Iran's goalkeeper finishing his  
**U.S. continues on C8**



JEROME SOLOMON  
COMMENTARY

## No resting on their laurels for the Astros

Less than a month after proving to be the best team in baseball, the Astros got better.

The signing of free-agent first baseman José Abreu is an instant boost to a squad that celebrated with a World Series championship parade three weeks to the day before the parties agreed to a three-year deal.

Sans a general manager — James Click was let go after the season — the Astros worked out an agreement with the consensus top-rated choice among unsigned first basemen.

Is applause deserved? Well, of course.

The business of baseball never stops. Not if you want to win.

The Astros do better when they aren't playing than the Texans and Rockets do in the middle of games.

When you have won as much as the Astros have in recent years, it would be easy

**Solomon continues on C6**

#### ASTROS

## Bagwell: Analytics focus goes 'too far'

By Chandler Rome  
STAFF WRITER

A curious revelation from a revered Astros icon might have revealed the cause of a chasm between James Click and his former employer.

After acknowledging his growing role in the franchise's makeshift front office, Hall of Famer Jeff Bagwell on Tuesday bemoaned the Astros' reliance on analytics and asserted that "this game is played by humans, man. It's not played by computers."

"The game has advanced so much," Bagwell said. "But at the end of the day, it's about driving runs in, scoring runs, getting 27 outs before the other team. That never changes. Trying to get a mix of both of those is what I'm trying to get some of up there because that's what (owner Jim Crane) wants."

Crane parted ways with Click earlier this month despite Houston's second World Series title in franchise history. On Tuesday, Crane said not to expect a new general manager until after the  
**Astros continues on C6**

# AN ABUSE OF TRUST

## TIMELINE

Mike Spiller, a gymnastics coach in Texas for the past five decades, is in Kendall County jail after being arrested on a charge of indecency with a child. Here are some key dates in the case:

### 1976

Spiller, who spent his childhood in Austin and briefly competed for a gymnastics club in Bellaire, returned to Houston and opened Gym-an-I Gymnastics with Gerald Bartosch. In 1982, Gym-an-I was bought out by Pat Alexander and Mike Rowland and absorbed into Sundance Athletic Club, which was later sold to Béla and Marta Károlyi.

### 1983

Anne Elrod Whitney attends a sleepover at Rowland's Northwest gymnastics facility. She says that Spiller, one of the gym's primary coaches, touched her inappropriately. She was 10.

"I actually, at that time, didn't know anything bad had happened," says Whitney, who is now 49 and resides in Pennsylvania. "I think I liked to be somebody's favorite, you know? And I know now that's the thing that happens to a lot of kids where, you know, there's (seeking) approval in a relationship, and even affection, from somebody that you care about."

### 1989

When Whitney was 14 and a freshman at Cypress Creek High School, her parents noticed behavioral changes and took her to see a psychologist. Whitney says she disclosed her abuse to the psychologist; a written evaluation provided to her parents from a March 1989 session says Whitney was "sexually molested by a gym teacher at the age of 10."

### 2017

The Gymnastics Association of Texas presented Spiller with a Life Membership Award, the organization's most prestigious honor given annually to "an outstanding Texas leader in gymnastics."

### April 5, 2022

A mother in Boerne dropped her 10-year-old daughter off for her weekly gymnastics class. About 40 minutes later, she received an alarming text message from her daughter: "Can you come get me? The coach is a pervert and he is grabbing me." The man was "Coach Mike." Spiller denied that his conduct was inappropriate but apologized.

### May 11, 2022

SafeSport contacted the mother in Boerne from the April 5 incident and also informed Boerne police, who had a detective call the family.

### June 13, 2022

SafeSport issued a no-contact directive and temporarily suspended Spiller based on allegations of misconduct.

### July 2022

Lorna Spellman, the owner of Boerne Gymnastics, said Spiller, a volunteer substitute coach, was no longer working at the gym.

### August 2022

Spiller took down the website for his Games of the World business and deleted his personal Facebook page. Before he went dark, his last public post to the social networking site, made Aug. 2, read, "Getting away from Facebook my friends." His profile has since been reinstated but is now private.

### Nov. 18, 2022

In the early morning hours, Spiller walked into the lobby of the Kendall County jail and turned himself in. Boerne police had put out a warrant for his arrest. He was booked into the Kendall County jail on a charge of indecency with a child.

### Nov. 29, 2002

A Kendall County grand jury returned an indictment against Spiller on the felony charge of indecency with a child. Law enforcement officials say they are aware of at least five victims who say Spiller abused them, including some cases that date to more than 20 years ago.



Ronald Cortes/Contributor

**Boerne Police Chief Steve Perez talks about the case involving Michael Spiller, who was arrested on charges of indecency with a child, during a news conference Tuesday following an indictment of Spiller by a Kendall County grand jury.**

## SPILLER

From page C1

dall County grand jury returned an indictment against Spiller, 75, on the felony charge of indecency with a child. Law enforcement officials say they are aware of at least five victims who say Spiller abused them. Some of the allegations date to more than 20 years ago.

For the past several decades, Spiller, who refers to himself in promotional materials as the "Doctor of Fun" and "Texas Games Guru," has worked with youth organizations and schools in Central America, the United Kingdom and Africa, as well as the United States. He has interacted with thousands of children at games workshops and summer circus camps in Texas, where he has ties to several cities, including Houston, Giddings, Galveston, and Boerne.

Now, Spiller is being investigated for sexually abusing multiple children by the U.S. Center for SafeSport, as well as the police department in Boerne, where he is registered as a USA Gymnastics member.

Whitney has been haunted by Spiller's abuse for decades. In May, she reported Spiller's actions to the U.S. Center for SafeSport, the congressionally mandated oversight agency with exclusive authority over sexual misconduct allegations in Olympic sports, and learned she was not alone.

Spiller's arrest did not stem from Whitney's account but from another victim's.

In October, the Boerne Police Department received a report of a sexual offense that took place around the summer of 2001 or 2002 at a "Circus Arts for Kids" camp at the Boerne Gymnastics Center. The victim, who was a child attending the camp, told police Spiller transported groups of children from the gym to a bed and breakfast.

On two separate occasions, the victim told police, Spiller exposed himself during bus rides by pointing the vehicle's rearview mirror down at his genitals. The victim said she told Spiller to stop, and he would not. Based on this account, police obtained an arrest warrant.

In a joint press conference held Tuesday, the Boerne Police Department and the Kendall County District Attorney's Office said Spiller bonded out of jail that morning by paying \$150,000 but was immediately arrested again on a second warrant for indecency with a child, stemming from the second offense relayed by the same victim.

Boerne Police Chief Steve Perez said his department is aware of three victims who were assaulted in Boerne and two who were assaulted in Houston. All the victims were around age 12 or 13 at the time of their assaults, Perez said.

Spiller has not made any statements to police.

Kendall County District Attorney Nicole Bishop said Spiller is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reason-

able doubt. She then urged other potential victims to come forward, no matter where or when the abuse occurred.

"No case is too old," Bishop said. "Additionally, specially trained victim advocates at the Kendall County Criminal District Attorney's Office are available to assist and provide support as well. And to anyone that believes they are a victim of a crime committed by Mr. Spiller: We are here to help. It is our top priority to provide a safe, secure and supportive environment for those who may wish to come forward. It takes courage to speak out, and we will honor that courage."

### 'The coach is a pervert and he is grabbing me'

On April 5 of this year, a mother in Boerne dropped her 10-year-old daughter off for her weekly Tuesday gymnastics class. About 40 minutes later, she received an alarming text message from her daughter: "Can you come get me? The coach is a pervert and he is grabbing me."

The Chronicle does not identify victims of sexual assault without their consent. (In this report, the mother will be referred to by the pseudonym Diane Perry to protect the identity of her underage daughter.) After receiving the text message from her daughter, Perry immediately drove to Boerne Gymnastics Center, located about 30 miles northwest of San Antonio. She found her daughter sitting in the parent waiting room. Perry's daughter told her that a man she knew only as "Coach Mike," who was instructing the class that day as a substitute for a coach who had COVID-19, had put his hand inside the back of her leotard during vault exercises and touched her buttocks twice.

Perry says she confronted Spiller, who denied that his conduct was inappropriate but apologized to her.

"There's a lot of touching in gym," Perry says. "There's spotting. Like, I've seen my daughter's original coach with the back of his hand hit their hip flexors and say, 'Tighten up, tighten up,' you know, but there was absolutely no reason that someone should have their hand down the back of someone's leotard, and there was absolutely no reason that you should touch their buttock."

### Investigation by SafeSport

Whitney and Perry are both participating in the investigation with SafeSport, an independent center created in 2017 after the scandal involving USA Gymnastics physician Larry Nassar revealed widespread abuse within the sport.

On June 13, SafeSport issued a no-contact directive and temporarily suspended Spiller based on allegations of misconduct, according to information from the agency's public disciplinary database.

Additionally, Perry and her daughter filed a complaint against Spiller with the Boerne Police Department in May. In July, the Chronicle requested criminal complaints made

against Spiller from the Boerne police. The police and the city of Boerne objected to the release of the records, citing an individual's right to privacy, and the Texas attorney general ruled in their favor.

On Tuesday, Perez said his department's investigation into Spiller began this fall after it received the report about the camp bus ride incidents. Police had received information about Spiller prior to that report, but "nothing that was concrete," the chief said.

Whitney says the SafeSport intake coordinator who conducted her initial interview told her the center received two complaints about Spiller that same week from the parents of current minors, meaning there is likely another recent victim.

A SafeSport spokesman told the Chronicle he could not confirm the number of complainants or comment on specifics of an investigation. But in a list of definitions available on its website, the center specifies, "A Temporary Suspension is only implemented in matters where the Center has sufficient evidentiary support."

The harshest punishment SafeSport can impose after an investigation is completed is a permanent ban from participation in the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic movements. Because SafeSport does not have criminal jurisdiction, however, temporary or final sanctions it imposes apply only to programs under the U.S. Olympic or Paralympic umbrella. Barring interference from law enforcement, Spiller can still interact with children at his private camps.

Lorna Spellman, the owner of Boerne Gymnastics, told the Chronicle when reached by phone in July that she was aware of SafeSport's investigation and that Spiller, a volunteer substitute coach, was no longer working at the gym.

Perez said police have spoken with Spellman and that "the cooperation is minimal."

Perry has since removed her daughter from the Boerne Gymnastics program and is cooperating with police. Whitney, a professor of education at Penn State University who resides there with her two children, is still coming to terms with the sexual abuse she experienced as a child gymnast in Houston.

Both women say they are sharing their experiences publicly in the interest of protecting children and to encourage other potential victims to come forward.

"I became aware he was still in the gymnastics field and interacting with kids at camps in a very similar context to this day, and that was very striking," Whitney says. "It's been really meaningful, honestly, that it's been taken seriously. Horrible to find out there have been others, but at the same time it's kind of vindicating. I wasn't just being dramatic or sensitive. We're dealing with a habitual predator on kids."

Says Perry: "I believe my daughter 100 percent. And even if it was a misunderstanding, I

still would have reacted the same way with my complaint, my concern in removing her while that coach was in the gym. But after the way the gym handled it, there was absolutely no doubt in my mind that my daughter's not safe there."

### Support for daughter

On April 5, shortly after she confronted Spiller outside her daughter's class, Perry met with Spellman in the owner's office at Boerne Gymnastics and relayed her daughter's account of what happened.

By the end of April, Perry said no one had followed up with her about Spiller. She complained to one of her daughter's coaches and called the gym to withdraw her membership.

Perry says that following multiple conversations, Spellman did eventually report Spiller to SafeSport. The agency contacted Perry on May 11 and also informed Boerne police, who had a detective call Perry. Child Protective Services was notified as well but declined to investigate because SafeSport and police were already handling it, according to Perry. She and her daughter conducted separate interviews with police and SafeSport.

After those interviews, the SafeSport investigator told Perry something she hadn't known before. Perry's daughter told the investigator that Spiller had intentionally separated her and another girl from the rest of the gymnasts, saying he wanted to instruct them independently, before the inappropriate touching occurred.

Perry also came across a blog post Whitney wrote about Spiller's abuse in the 1980s. That made Perry even more determined to cooperate with investigators and help get justice for her daughter.

"It just reaffirmed that what my daughter said not only is accurate, but there is a much deeper pattern of inappropriate contact with that coach," Perry says. "His history, whether or not it's proven, doesn't matter to me. I have no doubt this man's a predator."

### High-profile part of sport

The youth gymnastics community in Texas, though large, is also tight-knit and interconnected, according to those familiar with the scene. It is common for gymnastics programs to bring in coaches from other programs to assist with summer camps and noncompetitive activities. Many of the most prominent gyms in the state, particularly in metropolitan hubs like Houston, have coaches and owners whose established reputations in the sport date back decades.

As a coach in Houston in the 1970s and '80s, Spiller ran in circles with people who became incredibly high-profile in the world of gymnastics. They included Béla and Marta Károlyi, the former Olympic coaches who owned the Texas ranch where Nassar would later abuse scores of gymnasts; USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame inductee Jim Culhane; and Gerald

*Spiller continues on C5*

# AN ABUSE OF TRUST



Ronald Cortes/Contributor

**Kendall County District Attorney Nicole Bishop is asking any victims of Michael Spiller to come forward and tell their stories, no matter when the abuse occurred, with the assurance they will be provided “a safe, secure and supportive environment.”**

## From page C4

Bartosch, a former president of the Greater Houston Gymnastics Association and one of Spiller's business partners.

Spiller spent his childhood in Austin and as a teenager briefly competed for a gymnastics club based in Bellaire before finishing high school in Austin. As an adult, after briefly leaving Texas, he returned to Houston and in 1976 opened Gym-an-I Gymnastics along with Bartosch. In 1982, Gym-an-I was bought out by Pat Alexander and Mike Rowland and absorbed into Sundance Athletic Club, which was later sold to the Károlyis.

In 1983, when Whitney joined a gym known then as Rowland's Center of Northwest Houston — today, the company is Rowland/Ballard — Spiller was working there as a part-owner and coach.

In an informational letter Spiller sent to parents dated Aug. 25, 1983, a copy of which Whitney provided to the Chronicle, he wrote, “I appreciate the trust you have placed in us by enrolling your child in our program.”

In the six-page letter, which was typed on Rowland's stationery, Spiller went on to explain what parents and children could expect at the gym. Slumber parties were first on the list of activities. In his signature, he identified himself as the program's owner and director.

## Lasting effect on victim

Whitney says Spiller never verbally acknowledged her molestation or indicated that he knew what he was doing was wrong. Soon after, Whitney switched to a different gym run by the Károlyis, and she eventually quit gymnastics in eighth grade, when she hit puberty and began to realize Spiller had done something bad to her.

“When I went into gymnastics, I was chipper, smiley, talented, academically identified as gifted, top of every contest or class or anything, growing up in an affluent suburb where every opportunity was mine,” Whitney says. “And I really just deteriorated from there into a kid who, every report card I got was, ‘So smart but doesn't work to potential,’ or, ‘Needs self-esteem.’”

When Whitney was 14 and a freshman at Cypress Creek High School, her parents noticed behavioral changes and took her to see a psychologist. Whitney says she disclosed her abuse to the psychologist; a written evaluation provided to her parents from a March 1989 session at Willowbrook Psychological in Houston says Whitney was “sexually molested by a gym teacher at the age of 10.”

The report contains the signatures of Dr. Ed Charlesworth and Dr. Charles J. Schaefer. Reached by phone at his home in Las Vegas, Schaefer confirmed he was employed by the clinic during that time but said he had no memory of Whitney or her account of sexual abuse.

Charlesworth still works at Willowbrook. When reached

by email, Charlesworth said he was unable to confirm the identity of a former patient and added that Willowbrook destroys clinical records seven years after a patient's last date of service. As for whether he recalls reporting Whitney's abuse to state authorities, Charlesworth wrote, “We do report child abuse to CPS on occasion, but we do not maintain records of that reporting once our clinical records are destroyed.”

In the decades that followed, Whitney says she gradually told more people, family members and boyfriends about what happened to her. All the while, Whitney says she experienced a ripple effect stemming from the abuse she suffered at Spiller's hands.

“I have had a lot of trouble trusting myself and having strong boundaries, and I walked my way into all kinds of unsafe, unhealthy relationships, and I disengaged from school and the family even further than I would have,” she says. “I have a career, and I'm a professor, and I'm proud of my life, and I'm doing amazing, but you know, I've been in some kind of treatment or therapy off and on since high school into the present day. And I'm grateful that I have; I value it tremendously. But I don't think that I would have experienced this level of need for that had things gone a different way.”

## Social media goes dark

On June 14, the day after SafeSport's suspension was enacted, Spiller posted on Facebook, as he often does multiple times each day. This post contained an image of a Native American man holding a baby accompanied by the words, “Protect all children, even if they are not yours.”

In August, Spiller took down the website for his Games of the World business and deleted his personal Facebook page. Before he went dark, his last public post to the social networking site, made Aug. 2, read, “Getting away from Facebook my friends.” His profile has since been reinstated but is now private.

In the early morning hours of Nov. 18, six days before Thanksgiving, Spiller walked into the lobby of the Kendall County jail and turned himself in.

Under Texas law, indecency with a child is a felony charge. If convicted, Spiller could face up to 20 years in prison for each count.

Perry says she was initially uneasy about pursuing a criminal investigation against Spiller, not wanting to further traumatize her daughter, but that her daughter “never wavered” from wanting to report the abuse.

Bishop, the Kendall County DA, said that under Texas law, there is no statute of limitations on sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault or indecency with a child.

While some states might have statutes that prevent prosecution of older cases, SafeSport has no such limitations. The center has held people accountable for decades-old

abuses, but its process has also been criticized for being inefficient and ineffective.

Even as investigators probed into his past before his arrest, Spiller was still hosting events for children and teens across Texas through Games of the World. On June 5, he held training for summer camp counselors in Houston. His now-suspended website advertised sign-ups for multiple circus gymnastics camps in Boerne in July for children as young as 5.

A header at the top of the website's homepage, in bright yellow font on a black background, read, “Mike Spiller — L.T.D.F. (License to Deliver Fun).”

In 2017, the Gymnastics Association of Texas presented Spiller with a Life Membership Award, the organization's most prestigious honor given annually to “an outstanding Texas leader in gymnastics.” Spellman, the Boerne gym owner, was elected as a life member in 2010.

In a self-authored biography on the organization's website, Spiller touts not only his history in Texas but also his military service and his experience coaching gymnastics elsewhere.

Spiller wrote that he was in the U.S. Marines from 1968-72 and “was the only U.S. serviceman to build a trampoline in a combat zone” in 1970 in Vietnam. A request for Spiller's military service records submitted to the National Personnel Records Center did not turn up any results.

Spiller wrote that after the Marines, he coached gymnastics at recreational clubs in Laguna Beach and Vista, Calif. He then returned to Texas and opened Gym-an-I. After it was sold and after he worked at Rowland's, he wrote, he went to Switzerland, where he said he helped train members of the nation's junior national team ahead of the 1985 World Championships in Montreal. That preceded head coaching positions at gyms in Santa Fe, N.M., and Waimea, Hawaii.

The Chronicle attempted to verify Spiller's various places of employment outside Texas and could not, either because workplaces searched and did not find records of his employment or because some businesses no longer exist and could not be contacted. A former colleague at the gym in Santa Fe confirmed that Spiller coached there in the mid '80s and said no one there was aware of abuse allegations from that time. Police departments in Laguna Beach, Santa Fe and the Island of Hawaii said they did not have criminal or arrest records for Spiller.

Due to Spiller's wide-ranging work history, Perez said Boerne police have looped in the Texas Rangers and the FBI. So far, Perez said, police have not found evidence Spiller has a criminal history outside of the incidents already reported.

Games of the World, which Spiller first registered as an assumed business name with Harris County in 1993, represents his second act. But Spiller

never fully left the world of gymnastics coaching.

He maintained his USA Gymnastics membership and, in addition to occasionally volunteering as a substitute coach at Boerne Gymnastics and other gyms, within the past six months led events at an elementary school and the Bellaire Parks and Recreation.

## How kids process trauma

Dr. Lisa Fontes, a faculty member at the University of Massachusetts Amherst who has written several books on domestic violence and child abuse, says child abusers groom not only their victims but their communities.

“Often if the person is in kind of a helping position — they're a coach or a scout troop leader or teacher or clergy member — it's really hard for the community to believe that this happened right under their noses,” Fontes says. “It's very, very painful for parents to realize that their children were exposed to this person, for neighbors to face it. And so they need to understand that they were groomed, they were deliberately tricked, and that some abusers can be very good at it.”

Children also process trauma differently to adults, according to Dr. Shavonne Moore-Lobban, a licensed psychologist in the D.C. area who specializes in treating trauma. Children might not have the language to describe their experience. It is common for survivors of child abuse not to report their assault until adulthood, as Whitney did.

“Shame, confusion, fear are just some of the top reasons,” Moore-Lobban explains. “Danger isn't that predictable. You can't always stop it. But I think because in lots of ways we are taught over the course of life that you have some ability to keep yourself safe, when you're not safe it can make a person wonder what did they do wrong. ... It could also be that you don't want to get the person in trouble, especially if it is a person that is in a position of power over you, is in a respected position, like people who are taking advantage of others often are.”

Spiller's abuse, Whitney says, has “affected me in almost every way.” She continually grapples with feelings of guilt and shame. She decided to speak out now, even knowing legal recourse is slim, in an attempt to find inner peace and make potential victims aware of Spiller's history.

“It's too late in terms of the legal sense of the word,” she says, “but not too late in the moral sense or my life or those kids' lives.”

*If you are a victim or have information about this case, you are asked to call Boerne police at (830) 249-8645 or email lead investigator James Vela, [jvela@boerne-tx.gov](mailto:jvela@boerne-tx.gov), or Lieutenant Chris Walk, [cwalk@boerne-tx.gov](mailto:cwalk@boerne-tx.gov).*

*The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services Abuse Hotline: 1-800-252-5400.*

*[danielle.lerner@chron.com](mailto:danielle.lerner@chron.com)  
[twitter.com/danielle\\_lerner](https://twitter.com/danielle_lerner)*

## WHAT TO KNOW

Mike Spiller, a gymnastics coach in Texas for the last five decades, is in Kendall County jail after being arrested on a charge of indecency with a child, as first reported by the Houston Chronicle. What to know about Spiller and the case:

### Who is Mike Spiller?

Spiller, 75, refers to himself in promotional materials as the “Doctor of Fun” and “Texas Games Guru.” He has worked with youth organizations and schools in Central America, the United Kingdom and Africa, as well as the United States. In Texas, he has interacted with thousands of children at games workshops and summer circus camps.

As a coach in Houston in the 1970s and '80s, Spiller ran in circles with people who became incredibly high-profile in the world of gymnastics. They included Béla and Marta Károlyi, the former Olympic coaches who owned the Texas ranch where former U.S. national team doctor Larry Nassar would later abuse scores of gymnasts; USA Gymnastics Hall of Fame inductee Jim Culhane; and Gerald Bartosch, a former president of the Greater Houston Gymnastics Association and one of Spiller's business partners.

### A Houston history

In 1983, Anne Elrod Whitney had joined a gymnastics team at Rowland's Northwest. She describes being touched by Spiller during a team sleepover at the Rowland's facility. Whitney, who was 10, did not understand what happened but has been haunted by it.

Whitney switched to a different gym soon after and eventually quit gymnastics in eighth grade, when she hit puberty and began to realize Spiller had done something bad to her.

She reported the actions to the U.S. Center for SafeSport this year.

### Recent cases

In April this year, a 10-year-old told her mother that a coach at the Boerne Gymnastics Center was “grabbing me.” The man was known as “Coach Mike.” It was Spiller, who told the mom that his conduct was not inappropriate but apologized.

The mom filed complaints with SafeSport and the Boerne police.

Boerne Police Chief Steve Perez said his department is aware of three victims who were assaulted in Boerne and two who were assaulted in Houston. All the victims were around ages 12 or 13 at the time of their assaults, Perez said.

### Sanctions

SafeSport, an independent center created in 2017 after the Larry Nassar abuse scandal in U.S. gymnastics, issued a no-contact directive and suspended Spiller in June.

The organization could eventually ban Spiller for life from all USA Gymnastics events.

However, SafeSport does not control a coach's actions outside USA Gymnastics.

### Legal steps

Kendall County District Attorney Nicole Bishop said that under Texas law there is no statute of limitations on sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault or indecency with a child.

Under Texas law, indecency with a child is a felony charge. If convicted, Spiller could face up to 20 years in prison for each count.

### How to help

Bishop said that Spiller is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. She then urged other potential victims to come forward, no matter where or when the abuse occurred.

If you are a victim or have information about this case, you are asked to call Boerne police at (830) 249-8645 or email lead investigator James Vela, [jvela@boerne-tx.gov](mailto:jvela@boerne-tx.gov), or Lieutenant Chris Walk, [cwalk@boerne-tx.gov](mailto:cwalk@boerne-tx.gov).

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