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GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE

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A sign along Webster Avenue states "Ding Dong Aaron's Gone!" on April 26 in Green Bay. SARAH KLOEPPING/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

'It isn't right'

Resident dies 3 weeks after moving to new assisted living facility

Benita Mathew
Green Bay Press-Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

If you asked someone to describe Shirley Holtz in one word, most of them would say sweet.

Holtz, 91, could usually be found smiling and laughing or singing along and harmonizing to music with others, even as her dementia progressed.

As her symptoms started to advance more rapidly, Holtz never lost her joy, her family told the Press-Gazette.

Holtz lived in Algoma most of her life. She became a single mother to her four children and worked hard to provide for her family as a professional secretary for doctors in Algoma.

She had hoped that would be enough when the time came for her to move into her new home at a retirement

See **RESIDENT**, Page 4A

GRADE THE TRADE

Green Bay fans glad to be past Rodgers drama

Richard Ryman
Green Bay Press-Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

Aaron Rodgers' departure to New York is creating little of the angst that Green Bay Packers fans felt when Brett Favre was traded to the Jets in 2008.

The Packers traded Rodgers, a future hall of famer and their starting quarterback of the last 15 years, to the Jets for draft picks this year and next.

Packers fans were vexed when Green Bay traded Favre to the Jets in 2008 after that hall of fame quarterback unretired and the Packers had decided they would move on to Rodgers. That parting was far more acrimonious than the separation from Rodgers, as reflected in a poll we offered to readers. Our questions received responses from 945 readers.

Favre was beloved, Rodgers respected. Not all Packers fans feel good about losing Rodgers, but most accept that it is time for the Packers to move on to Jordan Love at quarterback.

Survey respondents overwhelming agreed the Packers made the right choice in trading Rodgers. Of 945 responses, 835 said the Packers made the correct decision.

"I'm glad the drama is finally over," wrote Brian Berg of Ellsworth. "Aaron Rodgers was the most talented regular-season quarterback that I have seen in my 50-plus years of watching the NFL. His play in the post-season has left a lot to be desired."

Packers fans were not much divided on our poll questions. Most questions had big majorities for the most popular answer. The one exception was



New Jets QB Aaron Rodgers (12) talks with Jets 2021 No. 2 pick Zach Wilson (2) during a joint NFL football training camp practice in 2021 with the Packers. MATT LUDTKE/AP

whether Jordan Love would lead the Packers to a Super Bowl. Packers fans, conditioned to be optimistic after 25 years of hall of fame quarterbacks, said yes, 55% to 45%.

Here are other questions, and answers that could be easily calculated:

Who are you most upset to see traded to the Jets, Brett Favre or Aaron Rodgers? (822 responses)

- Favre, 371, 45.1%
- Neither, 280, 34%
- Rodgers, 158, 19.2%
- Both, 13, 1.5%

See **RODGERS**, Page 8A

Ex-educator found guilty

Former teacher convicted of 4 counts of sexual assault

Danielle DuClos
Green Bay Press-Gazette
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

GREEN BAY — A Brown County jury on Wednesday found former Green Bay School District teacher David Villareal guilty of all four counts of child sexual assault he was charged with for sexually touching four of his former students at Baird Elementary.

The jury deliberated for about an hour before reaching a verdict that was read shortly before 1:30 p.m. Wednesday in Brown County Circuit Court.

Villareal's family and friends cried and hugged one another after he was taken into custody. Villareal had no visible reaction to the verdict.

The parents of the student victims were crying as they exited the courtroom.

The 48-year-old was convicted of sexually touching four female students between 2015 and 2016. The girls

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Guilty

Continued from Page 1A

were about 7 or 8 years old at the time. The Brown County District Attorney's Office called 18 witnesses while the defense called only one: Villareal himself — something the state said strengthened its case.

Victims and their families were present during closing arguments, and about 18 family and friends were sitting behind Villareal for support.

Villareal's supporters brought signs, which had to be removed from the courtroom. One said, "We love you Mr. Villareal."

Brown County Deputy District Attorney Wendy Lemkuil declined to comment on the case until after sentencing, which is scheduled for July.

Villareal's attorney, Kirk Obeare, also declined to comment on the verdict.

Green Bay School District spokesperson Lori Blakeslee declined to comment on Villareal's conviction or how Villareal continued to teach despite teachers and school personnel seeing warning signs of his behavior.

Prosecution said students are finally using their voices; defense argues the investigative process has skewed benign things.

Lemkuil argued that the students who came forward did so years later when they realized the touching was inappropriate.

"They came before you as 15- and 16-year-old-women who are ready to use their voice and stand up for what happened to them," Lemkuil said.

One of the key elements the state had to prove was that the touching was for sexual gratification, which Lemkuil argued was the case.

The defense argued in closing arguments Wednesday morning that incidents that were thought of as benign at the time are now being seen in a different light because of the investigation.

Obeare asked the jury to focus on the burden of proof of beyond a reasonable doubt. He did not tell the jury that the students were lying or that because they're children, they shouldn't be believed.

But he cautioned that society's view toward sexual assault has changed through the "Me Too" movement. He



Former Baird Elementary School teacher David Villareal is led from Brown County Circuit Court on Wednesday after a jury found him guilty of four counts of sexual assault involving students.

DANIELLE DUCLOS/
GREEN BAY
PRESS-GAZETTE

said it's led to a remedying of the past when victims of sexual assault were less likely to be believed.

While that's not a bad thing, it isn't something to rely on in the case, he said.

He also told the jury not to make its decision based on the emotions of the witnesses or just "in case" the touching happened.

"No one would ever want you to render a verdict for what we call a 'just-in-case situation,'" Obeare said. "That would not be justice."

Villareal testified on the stand that he never inappropriately touched any of his students, saying that the four child victims who testified in the case were not telling the truth.

"I believe that there's quite a bit of conspiracy against me," Villareal said.

The state called 18 witnesses, including the 4 child victims.

Lemkuil called the four victims to testify about the sexual abuse over the first two days of the trial.

The students, who were 7 or 8 years old at the time of the abuse, are all now 15 years old.

The first student to take the stand broke down crying during her testimony, causing the court to take a recess. She detailed how Villareal would touch her on her buttocks "almost every day," and it wasn't until she told a family friend about it years later that she realized it was abuse.

The state called the three other child victims as well as teachers at Baird Elementary who worked with Villareal and the parents of some former students.

A teacher who used to work with Villareal testified that even back in 2015 and 2016, she observed concerning be-

havior with Villareal. A parent of a former student also testified that she made a complaint to the school's principal six years ago about an incident with Villareal and her daughter that she found inappropriate.

Baird's school resource officer Scott Asplund and Green Bay Police Department special crimes Detective Craig Brey took the stand, along with a forensic interviewer at Green Bay's local child advocacy center.

Lemkuil also had an expert witness, Susan Lockwood, testify to the reasons behind the delayed reporting of abuse and the characteristics of grooming.

Villareal testified, disputing the children's testimony.

Villareal was on the stand for over an hour, and he adamantly denied all the accusations of sexual abuse.

He verified many of the general facts of the case, such as the layout of his classroom and that he had regular lunch "dates" with his female students in his classroom, usually with the lights off.

Villareal said he was never alone with any of victims in the case.

"It's your testimony here, and you want this jury to believe, that all these girls came forward giving consistent information about what you agreed to 80% of, you just disagree that you touched them inappropriately?" Lemkuil asked Villareal on cross-examination.

"I'm confident that's the case," Villareal said.

More about the charges and abuse:

Originally charged with five counts,

Lemkuil dropped one of the charges Monday morning due to the inability of a victim to be present for the trial.

The trial, which began Monday morning with jury selection, had been delayed multiple times since his arrest in April 2021, partly due to Villareal's struggle to secure and maintain counsel.

He's had five attorneys and fired his public defender in November due to a disagreement in defense strategies, according to court records. He was being held on a \$50,000 bond.

Villareal was a bilingual teacher at Baird, where he mainly taught second grade from 2014 until the spring of 2021 when he was arrested for sexually assaulting three of his former students.

In March 2021, he was accused of pinching and squeezing one of his student's buttocks every day between September 2015 and May 2016.

In that same school year, Villareal also touched the genitals of another second-grade student on the outside of her pants when she went up to ask him a question at his desk.

After Villareal's arrest in 2021, two more students came forward saying he sexually assaulted them during the 2015-16 school year.

One of these students said that he cornered her in a classroom closet, pushed her up against a wall and rubbed his erect penis against her chest. When she tried to leave, Villareal pushed her back into the closet multiple times.

The student said that was not the only time Villareal inappropriately touched her.

The other student who came forward after Villareal's arrest told police that he would grab her buttocks every day at the after-school running club at Baird Elementary.

Villareal resigned from the district in April 2021, shortly after his arrest.

Danielle DuClos is a Report for America corps member who covers K-12 education for the Green Bay Press-Gazette. Contact her at dduclos@gannett.com. Follow on Twitter @danielle_duclos. You can directly support her work with a tax-deductible donation at GreenBayPressGazette.com/RFA or by check made out to The GroundTruth Project with subject line Report for America Green Bay Press Gazette Campaign. Address: The GroundTruth Project, Lockbox Services, 9450 SW Gemini Drive, PMB 46837, Beaverton, Oregon 97008-7105.

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