

NEWS

Top 10 local stories of 2019 No. 3 — Shambhala scandals continue with arrests of two former teachers, revelation of a fixer



Courtesy photo / City of Boulder

The Boulder Shambhala Center is pictured at 1345 Spruce St.



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The year 2019 was difficult for members of Shambhala, the Boulder-born Buddhist and mindfulness community, with multiple revelations of sexual misconduct by members past and present, most notably its leader.

News of Shambhala during the year was dominated by continuing revelations stemming from the sexual misconduct scandal surrounding Shambhala International's leader, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

Allegations against him surfaced in a three-part report called the Buddhist Sunshine Project, which detailed allegations from anonymous women with first- and secondhand accounts of sexual misconduct by Mipham and other high-ranking Shambhala officials.

Mipham said in a statement he would step back from his leadership position at Shambhala International — which is now based in Halifax, Nova Scotia — pending an investigation.

More bad news came early in the year when William Lloyd Karelis, a former teacher at Boulder's Shambhala Center, was [accused of sexually assaulting a girl he was mentoring through the center](#). Investigators said the Buddhist community was aware of other allegations of inappropriate conduct against him when it expelled him in 2004.

Karelis was arrested on suspicion of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. At the time of his arrest, Shambhala's interim board released a statement reporting that Karelis, a member of the Shambhala community from its early days, had been the subject of two Care and Conduct complaint procedures in 2002 and 2008, initiated by women who believed he had behaved inappropriately toward them. His teaching and meditation instructor credentials were suspended in 2004, then revoked in 2008. He resigned from the organization in 2009.

Karelis, 72, has pleaded not guilty, is free on \$10,000 bond, and is set for trial June 15.

In June came the news that [Michael Smith a former member of the Boulder Shambhala Center](#), had been arrested on suspicion of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. According to an arrest affidavit, the named victim in Smith's case was assaulted by him multiple times beginning in 1997, when she was 13 years old.

In the wake of Smith's arrest came the revelation [he had undergone therapy and treatment in 1998 in exchange for his name being withheld from police](#), a deal which police reports showed was arranged by Dennis Southward, a man known in the Boulder Buddhist community as

Smith, 55, has pleaded not guilty and is scheduled for trial starting April 20. He, too, is free on \$10,000 bond.

July brought a detailed report by the Denver Post alleging that [Shambhala had for decades suppressed allegations of abuse](#) — from child molestation to clerical abuse — through internal processes that often failed to deliver justice for victims. The Post found through dozens of interviews with current and former members and a review of hundreds of pages of internal documents, police records and private communications.

Many details of those allegations were detailed in a 35-page open letter authored by a group of Mipham's former bodyguards that they felt had not been adequately addressed in the Buddhist Sunshine Report.

In September it was reported that [the 8,100-square-foot Boulder County home of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche on Marshall Drive in unincorporated Boulder County was on the market](#), for \$2.4 million. Also, the Shambhala organization sold Marpa House, a cohousing community where about 40 people with ties to Shambhala live, for \$4.9 million to a group of developers to pay off its debts.