

SHIRLEY: PRISON FOR ATTACK

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Author: ALFONSO A. CASTILLO

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When she arrived at her developmentally disabled son's hospital bedside after hearing he had been sexually assaulted with a plumbing tool, the man's mother found him crying - not from the pain, but because he believed it was "his fault," she said.

"All he was worried about was losing his job," the man's mother said at the sentencing of her son's two attackers yesterday in Riverhead.

Steven Rodriguez, 20, of Shirley, was sentenced to 20 years in prison while his co-defendant, Michael Lunsford, 18, also of Shirley, got 16 years for the October 2006 attack.

In imposing his sentence on Rodriguez, State Supreme Court Justice Robert W. Doyle said the crime could "only be described as vicious, brutal and barbaric in nature."

Newsday is not identifying the victim, 22, because he was the target of a sex crime. He was working at the AMF Shirley Lanes bowling alley when Rodriguez fetched a plumbing snake from a utility closet and followed him into the bathroom.

Prosecutors say Lunsford held the man down as Rodriguez inserted the tool into the man's rectum and then cranked it.

The man required surgery to remove the device and suffered serious internal injuries, prosecutors said.

Assistant District Attorney John Scott Prudenti called Rodriguez "evil personified."

Rodriguez's attorney, Michael Brown of Central Islip, said his client's actions are largely to blame on a poor upbringing, a "lack of any type of direction or focus" and various psychological problems.

Lunsford's attorney, Thomas Foy of Lake Grove, said his client was remorseful and was simply "in the wrong place at the wrong time."

The victim's mother said her son has largely recovered, found a new job and resumed a normal life.

"He has ... put this behind him and moved forward," she said.