

Comment

The Canadian Champion

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Beware of 'friends'

It's 11 o'clock. Do you know with whom your children are 'chatting?'

A recent court case should have parents extremely concerned about who their Web-surfing children may be 'meeting' on-line.

Last week, a 35-year-old man became the first Torontonian convicted of using a computer and the Internet to facilitate sexual interference with a person under the age of 14 — a law introduced just two years ago.

Evidence presented at trial showed the man had entered a teen chat room in September 2002 and began sending messages to a 10-year-old girl.

He gave a false name — a common practice by on-line users — and claimed to be 19.

At the time of their cyberspace encounter, the girl claimed to be 13. She was actually approaching her 11th birthday.

A month after their initial correspondence, the man had the girl to his Toronto apartment, gave her alcohol and attempted to have sex with her.

As shocking as this sounds, the case is a stark reminder of the responsibility parents have in knowing who their children are meeting on-line.

While our society might enjoy all the conveniences of the computer age, with

those advantages come completely new forms of criminal activity ranging from identity theft and fraud to pedophiles on the prowl for innocent prey.

Modern pedophiles can practise their predatory ways from the safe confines of home — waiting for just the right opportunity to pounce.

As parents, we should be asking ourselves if the warning signs are present.

Do you permit your child to chat with strangers on the Internet?

Has your child ever mentioned making a new friend through a chatroom or by e-mail?

Has your child's Internet 'buddy' suddenly proposed a face-to-face meeting?

A 'yes' response to any of these questions could mean your child is being targeted by an adult pretending to be someone he's not.

Most parents would want to meet a new friend before allowing their child to go out alone with him or her. The same rule should apply for Internet acquaintances.

Computers are an extremely useful tool; unfortunately criminals are finding the technology to be beneficial too.

Our Readers Write

Support in search for Kate was incredible

Dear Editor:

On October 3, Andrews' Scenic Acres was the site of a massive search for a missing nine-year-old girl.

We are most grateful to Halton Regional Police, as well as police from other jurisdictions, firefighters from Milton and Halton Hills, Halton Conservation staff, EMS personnel, Victims Services and the various other professionals who were called in.

Their help was absolutely amazing.

The good news is that Kate was found safely after an eight-hour search.

We especially wish to thank the multitude of volunteers — more than 300 in total — who helped in the search.

Among them were friends, neighbours, customers and staff of Andrews' Scenic Acres, our Mexican farm workers, Neighbourhood Watch volunteers, Heather Auger and folks from Boston Presbyterian Church, our son and daughter-in-law Kurtis and

Lara and their junior farmer friends, and people from Milton, Halton Hills and others from as far away as Guelph, Kitchener and Markham.

We especially appreciate our neighbours who refused to give up and who found the little girl at about 1:15 a.m.

The cheer from that moment will be forever etched in our memory.

We can't thank everyone enough. This is what community is all about, and we are so grateful.

Bert and Laurie Andrews
Andrews' Scenic Acres

Make sure you include your name, address and telephone number when submitting a letter to the editor for publication.

Spectacular fall colours are ready for your viewing

When it comes to fall leaves, we're all kids at heart.

Who doesn't love the crunch of fallen autumn leaves underfoot, and secretly wish they could go back to the days when a constructive afternoon meant raking and jumping, raking and jumping?

I had the opportunity recently to take a wagon ride through Hilton Falls Conservation Area up to the falls with local dignitaries just as the leaves were starting to change colours.

And wouldn't you know it, as soon as the wheels started rolling, titles disappeared and it was as if everyone was 20 years younger. There's a lot to be said about stopping to smell the roses — or in this case, slowing the pace long enough to gulp down the crisp autumn air.

I've often given plugs for our local conservation areas, and I'm not going to miss this chance to do it once again. If you've never spent time at

one or more of Milton's surrounding parks, there's no better time than now.

The view of the Niagara Escarpment is beautiful from Hwy. 401, but there's no way to describe how much more breath-taking it is when viewed up close — where the spectacular colours are just an arm's length away.

We in Milton are so fortunate to be surrounded by parks. In fact, the only difficult thing about spending a day amongst the autumn splendour is deciding just where to go. Hilton Falls is nice, but of course there's also Kelso, Crawford Lake, Mountsberg and Rattlesnake Point.

For leaf enthusiasts like myself, Kelso Conservation Area is offering a special opportunity to get out and enjoy the all-too-brief colours of fall.

Each weekend this month, the park is providing chairlift rides up the escarpment brow. The whole



Around town

with STEPHANIE THIESSEN

family can enjoy viewing the leaves from the unique vantage point.

Tickets cost \$7 for adults and seniors and \$5 for children aged 5 to 14. Preschoolers get in free. Families can pack a lunch to enjoy in the great outdoors or purchase a barbecued lunch at the park.

If you prefer a little more speed for your fall

touring, you can take advantage of Kelso's off-road trails, perfect for mountain biking. Kelso is offering unlimited chairlift rides for cyclists and their bikes to the top of the escarpment.

A combination trail pass and unlimited lift ticket costs just \$12 for the entire day — about the price of a movie ticket.

Before setting off for the wagon ride at Hilton Falls, I learned just what it is that causes the annual colour change. But I prefer not to think about the practical explanation, and am choosing to keep those of you who don't know the technicalities in the dark.

After all, certain things are better left up to one's imagination.

So get out and enjoy the colours. The drab winter weather will be here soon enough.

For more information about local conservation areas, visit www.conservationhalton.on.ca.