

Stouffville Tribune

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EDITORIAL

We streetproof students, now it's time for computer proofing

The Internet is a gift.
But it can also be a burden.

That fact hit every parent this week when yet another story surfaced of pedophiles using the Net to hunt children.

Toronto police say a man who befriended an 11-year-old in a Internet chatroom arranged to meet her and took her to a hotel.

It's the kind of horror story that makes parents want to confiscate their children's computers or, at least, disconnect them from the information highway.

But, of course, that's unrealistic. Internet access is everywhere. If children don't go online at home, they can connect at the library, at school or at a friend's home.

Parents are the first line of defence. They need to keep computers in an open area such as the family room or kitchen; a place where they can watch their youngsters when they are online.

Parents may even consider banning their children from chatrooms until they are old enough to understand the dangers.

Unfortunately, not every child has responsible parents.

Society — schools and the police — must also play a role to make sure our children know danger lurks online.

Const. Steve Morrell, spokesperson for York Regional Police, says children are given Internet safety tips when community officers visit schools.

But he agrees there needs to be a more vigilant approach to ensuring our children aren't snared by a web-savvy pedophile.

"We need to computer-proof our kids in the same way we streetproof them," Const. Morrell says.

"We need to stay one step ahead of the pedophiles because they are very proficient in the use of computers."

Every parent and every child knows the phrase "Stranger, Danger". Streetproofing programs are continually re-inforced.

Police and schools teach the children, which, in turn, filters back to parents.

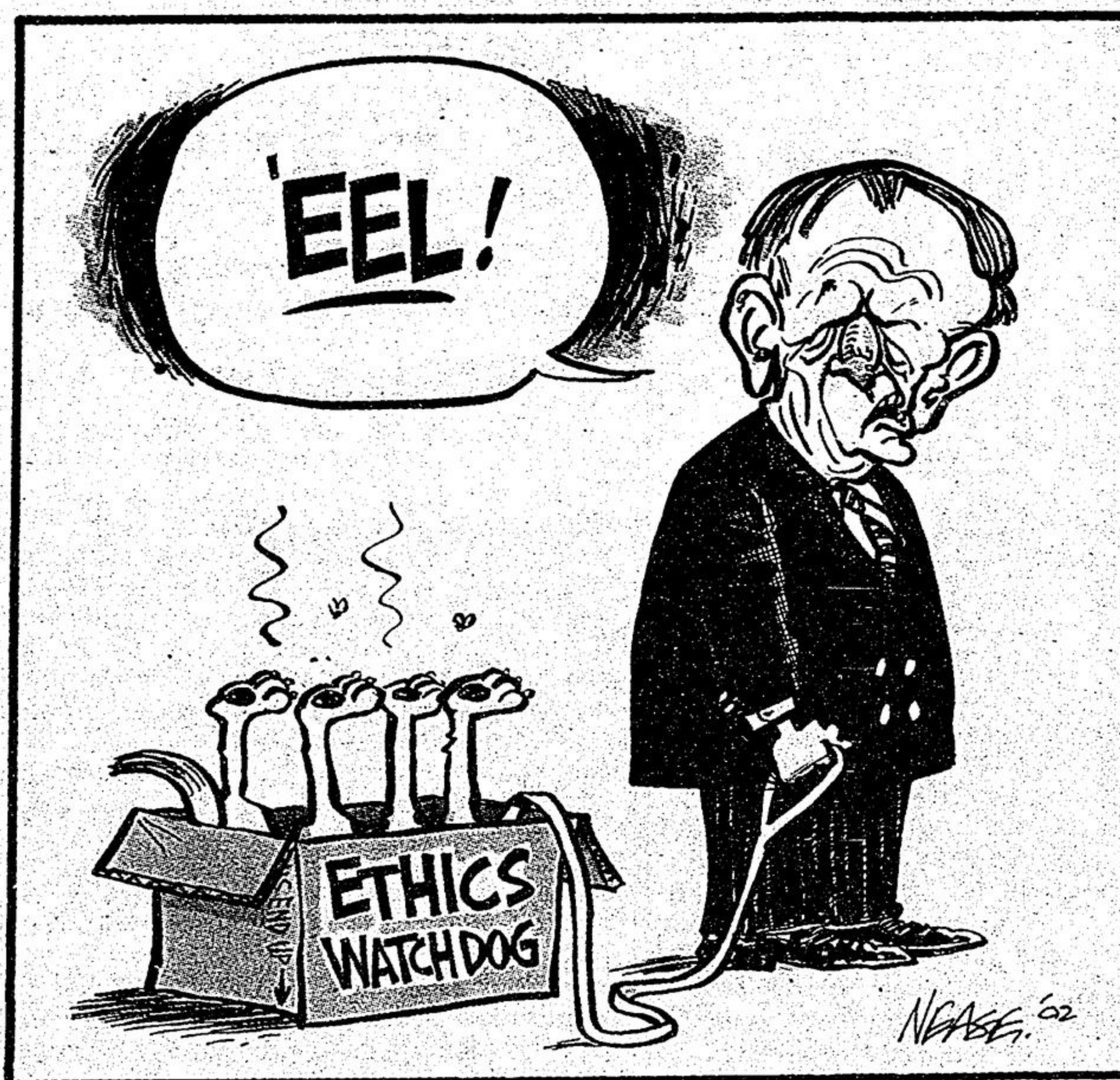
Now there is Stranger Danger in cyberspace. Streetproofing programs need to be adapted to Internet-surfing children, so they know when they're being pursued in a chatroom.

A united front — parents, schools and police — will go a long way in protecting our children without denying them the gift of the Internet.

OPINION

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Let's do better for York's hungry

I was taken aback the other week when the supermarket cashier asked me if I wanted to add \$2 to my bill for the food drive.

Apparently, that's more than a lot of grocery stores did to support the Thanksgiving food drive, leaving the York Region Food Network scrambling to catch up.

The local group says, after an abysmal start, media coverage has brought donations up to half the drive's goal — still well behind where they should be.

The poor response is being blamed on a focus group's advice to scrap the paper bag stuffed inside newspapers used to promote previous drives. Instead, the food banks partnered with grocery stores, expecting heavy-duty in-store promotions.

But in some cases, stores did little more than leave a collection bin at the front door. Even in my case, apparently at the high end of food store participation, the hungry lost out.

I would normally spend a lot more than \$2 on canned goods for a food drive. This time out, having forgotten to pick up any donations, I figured, "Oh well, I gave 'em a couple of bucks. If everyone did that, there'd be plenty to go around." Yes, I am ashamed of myself.

Stores and governments have written food banks into their business plans. Food banks have responded by becoming more business-like.

I remember attending York Region Food Network meetings with about a dozen people in the basement of Richmond Hill United Church in the mid-'80s. Back then, we saw it as a stop gap, a way for the ordinary person to help a neighbour through hard times.

Now this agency maintains office space and has paid staff to handle the growing demand, administer programs and lobby governments.

Nobody's even pretending food banks will be going out of business.

But without donations, the whole system comes crashing down, as we saw last weekend.

A lot of factors combined to hurt this drive, one of the biggest being the surprise attack on donors' budgets perpetrated by the hydro utilities. But you know what? That's just plain wrong.

The kid who is going hungry didn't raise your hydro bill. He didn't decide to turn food banks into institutions, nor did he design their marketing strategy.

He's just hungry. He doesn't need our excuses or our judgments. He needs food. And there are about 3,000 like him in York Region alone.

The food drive continues to Oct. 27. You can drop your donations at grocery stores or fire halls. As for me, I can do better than two lousy bucks.

Why is renovation bill so high?

Re: Giant fix-up bill for citizens?, Tribune, Sept. 19.

It is interesting when the Arrowsmith group was proposing to buy Stouffville's old town hall for \$50,000, it put the total cost of the renovation at \$770,000.

Now that the building has remained in the hands of the town, Mayor Wayne Emmerson is stating he would like to see Arrowsmith help to restore the building at a cost of \$1.2 million.

Could someone explain how the cost of renovation could skyrocket so quickly?

The other point I would like to make clear is the cost of renovation need not all come from the town: There are grants available, both federal and provincial, that should be explored before any final figure is put forward.

I find it disturbing and sad our mayor would throw out this figure without first making an effort to see how we might restore this building in a fiscally responsible manner.

I would also like to ask the town how it intends to determine what to do with the building. Of the numerous conversations I had with the people in this town, the one idea that kept coming back, again and again, was this: a theatre with the potential to show movies would be a great asset in trying to bring the downtown back to life.

The idea of giving the building to the Silver Jubilee Club will only result in our having one more empty building downtown.

Finally, I challenge the mayor and council

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Write: Letters to the Editor, 9 Heritage Rd., Markham, L3P 1M3, e-mail letters@econsun.com

to find out what the people of this community would like to see in the old town hall. After all, it will be our tax dollars paying for it.

PAM MANDICH
STOUFFVILLE

Harassment of smokers is wrong

Let me start by saying I am not a smoker. Never was, never will be. Having said that, I am becoming tired of the harassment by the region's "smoke police" of people doing something perfectly legal.

It reminds me of a certain European country during the period of 1933 to 1945, where, if you didn't conform, they would kick down your door and carry you away.

I know the comparison is A) a bit extreme, and B) will offend some, but where does one draw the line? Can prohibition be far behind? Keep this in mind: Prohibition didn't work.

LARRY ROWE

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