

Community

Gulf Breeze NEWS

Judge calls for families to monitor children's use of MySpace site

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A federal judge in Texas ruled in favor of MySpace last week in a civil lawsuit brought by the family of a teen, "Julie Doe," who alleged she was sexually abused by someone she met on the site.

"If anyone had a duty to protect Julie Doe, it was her parents, not MySpace," wrote judge Sam Sparks as he dismissed the case. "To impose a duty under these circumstances for MySpace to confirm or determine the age of each applicant, with liability resulting from negligence in performing or not performing duty, would of course stop MySpace's business in its tracks and close this avenue of communication, which Congress in its wisdom has decided to protect."

Florida's Attorney General Bill McCollum cites concern for youth on the internet, and internet security for minors as his number one concern. "It is vitally important for everyone - state leaders, law enforcement, parents, teachers, and anyone else connected to the well-being of our children - to join the fight to keep kids safe. Additionally, MySpace is working with the state of Florida to introduce legislation designed to help them prevent any registered sex offenders or predators from joining their sites," McCollum expressed in a statement. "A top priority is keeping Florida's children safe from online predators. While parents should be integrally involved in protecting their children, there are mechanisms that can be put in place to ensure further safety in the online environment."

McCollum referenced the proposal to amend the CS/HB 573 to require predators to register with the state "any electronic mail addresses and any instant message name..." for monitoring purposes. Currently, predators

"If anyone had a duty to protect Julie Doe, it was her parents, not MySpace"

- Sam Sparks
Federal Judge
United States District Court
Western District of Texas

tors must register such information as address, phone, place of work, etc.

The Texas judge cited the Communications Decency Act of 1996 as protecting MySpace from liability for material posted by users. Texas law doesn't require policing of MySpace user accounts, according to the judge, and does not have the burden to protect users from crimes committed by other members.

MySpace faces suits from at least four other angry families, after their underage daughters were sexually abused by adults they met on the site, according to lawyers for the families. The lawyers who filed the latest lawsuits said the plaintiffs include a 15-year-old girl from Pennsylvania, a 14-year-old from New York and two South Carolina sisters, ages 14 and 15.

Public record shows the law firms, Barry & Loewy LLP of Austin, Texas, and Arnold & Itkin LLP of Houston, said families from New York, Texas, Pennsylvania and South Carolina filed separate suits last month in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleging negligence, recklessness, fraud and negligent misrepresentation by the companies.

The Florida Attorney General's office warned of online predator use of the sites for years, and school officials and police encourage parents to monitor its usage and become aware of its potential hazards. McCollum is pursuing legislation which gives law enforcement agencies and prosecuting bodies stronger tools to fight the exploitation of children online,

and pursuing a funding request to increase the size of his Child Predator CyberCrime Unit.

MySpace and other youth-oriented sites received pressure to cooperate with authorities and to expand protection of juvenile users. Part of the draw of the MySpace circle of friends is an ongoing invitation to expand their circle and welcome new "friends." The free messaging tool and personal profile pages are a popular communication tool in the 14-34 age group, according to police. The problem arises when older users deliberately target and lure juveniles, and move into their inner circle as "friends."

MySpace responded with added educational efforts, cooperation with law enforcement and a new tool due this summer that will let parents see some aspects of their child's online profile, including the stated age. That tool is expected this summer. But parents must know what their child is up to in order to monitor the sites.

There is no way to confirm a users actual age online. Attorney generals throughout the U.S. have asked MySpace to ban users under 16 from the site and add age verification procedures.

Allegations of violation of freedom of speech rights could surely follow tightened user guidelines as teens share the First Amendment rights that adults enjoy. MySpace could easily argue that any proposed laws regulating the site would constitute an impermissible restriction on free speech - for all their clients, adult or juvenile.

Solution 4B

Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

7		9		1	8			
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Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ★

★ Moderate ★★ Challenging
★★★ HOO BOY!

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Solution 4B

REMOVE DOUBLE LETTERS TO MAKE A NEW WORD

MAGIC MAZE

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions - forward, backward, up, down and diagonally.

Bedding, Beggar, Coffer, Dated, Fable, Hooded, Grassy, Meadow, Mole, Phases, Summer, Summer

LAFF-A-DAY

"At what age can I start noticing that boys notice me, Mom?"

MISTER BREGER

By Dave Berger

"Frankly, I don't understand why people always complain they can't catch a waiter's eye."

Super Crossword

Solution 4B

ACROSS

- 1 Dog star
- 5 Iraqi city
- 10 Norwegian song
- 14 Act like
- 18 Towel word
- 19 Starred city
- 20 Feminist
- 21 - Gius
- 22 Elusive
- 25 Shun
- 26 Brand's
- 27 Part of ER
- 28 Synthetic
- 30 Explicit
- 31 Pipeline
- 34 Fairway
- 35 Sa'am
- 37 Adored one
- 38 Rejected
- 42 Scads
- 43 Future of
- 48 Po
- 47 British
- 48 Faux
- 49 Unlashed
- 50 Warehouse
- 51 Chairman
- 52 Bog
- 53 Crested
- 54 Vision
- 55 Novelist
- 56 Carr
- 57 Lugene
- 58 Remotely
- 59 Hallish
- 60 Directional
- 61 Bruised
- 62 Sage
- 63 Malicious
- 64 Marvin
- 65 Ira
- 66 Silas
- 67 Shunk
- 68 Canada
- 69 Cal-ga
- 70 Oscillation
- 71 Sprig
- 72 Sirrus
- 73 Opera
- 74 Fancy
- 75 Tensup
- 76 Designer
- 77 Magna
- 78 Police
- 79 Acronym
- 80 Zich
- 81 Morly
- 82 Python
- 83 Related
- 84 Docile
- 85 Irish island
- 86 Pressure
- 87 K-O
- 88 School
- 89 Grinch
- 90 Sentinel
- 91 Zenith
- 92 Deal
- 93 Str
- 94 Fir
- 95 Hilarious
- 96 Hardy
- 97 Like
- 98 scmo
- 99 textbooks
- 100 Bean
- 101 Wellus
- 102 A bit of
- 103 Requir-
- 104 Baseball's
- 105 Wretch
- 106 Confound
- 107 Convant
- 108 Actress
- 109 Diamond
- 110 Exponent
- 111 The
- 112 Juggle
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