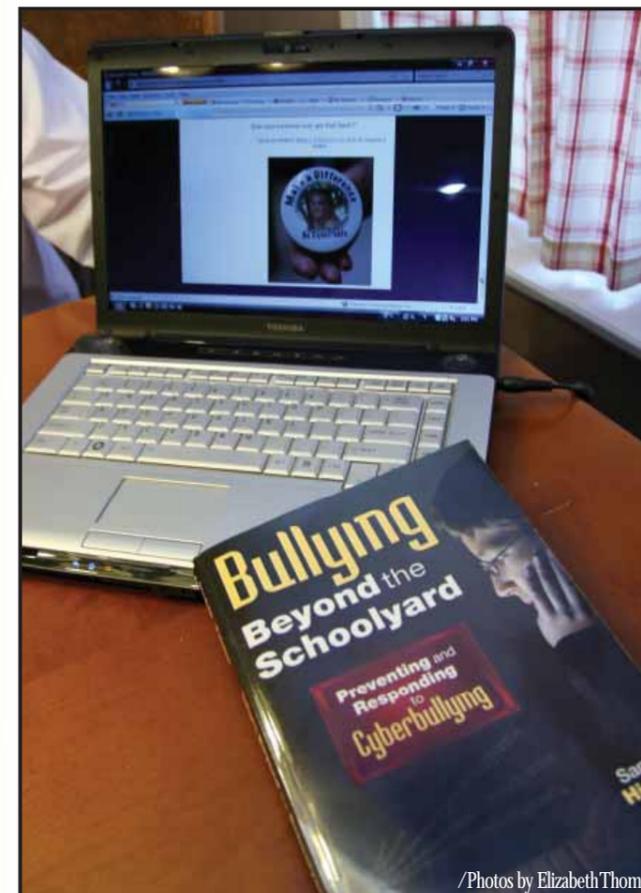


CYBER CRIMES DIVISION CREATED TO FIGHT INTERNET CRIMES

/Kelly Foreman, Public Information Officer



/Photos by Elizabeth Thomas

▲ Mt. Washington father Mark Neblett has made it his mission to see his daughter, Rachael's life make a difference through educating others about cyber bullying. Rachael committed suicide after being stalked on MySpace.

Rarely was Rachael Neblett seen without her signature pink lip gloss and sunglasses. A bubbly strawberry blonde, the 17-year-old Bullitt County cheerleader had big dreams of going to college in Florida to become a brain surgeon.

"She was just full of life and just so happy," said Mark Neblett, Rachael's father. "She never frowned a lot, I mean, she was a joy."

On October 9, 2006, that bubbly little girl became so overwhelmed by the threats and harassment of a faceless Internet stalker that she took her own life to escape them. Sadly, Rachael is not alone. Children across Kentucky and the nation fall victim each day to cyber bullying – a crime Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway is fighting with a newly created cyber crimes division.

"The day she died, a bunch of her friends met out in our front yard and brought a 27-foot banner over," Mark Neblett said. "They had all the friends put pink lip gloss on and kiss this banner – even the boys. It was something."

"But they were telling us how scared she was and the word most used was terrified," he said. "She was just so terrified."

Like many teens, Rachael had a MySpace account, which is where her stalker chose to attack. Mark Neblett said he does not know how long the threats had been coming before he and Rachael's mother, Donna Neblett, found out about >>>



▲ Rachael Neblett, a 17-year-old high school cheerleader, never made it to her graduation. Her father, Mark Neblett, left, now works to keep other children safe online.

>> them from their oldest daughter, Patricia.

The e-mail that sent Rachael over the edge threatened, "I am not going to put you in the hospital, I am going to put you in the morgue." The family took the e-mails to the school principal, but nothing helped to relieve Rachael's fears. She soon stopped wanting to go to school or spend time with her friends, Mark Neblett said.

After coming home from work, Donna Neblett found her daughter lying in the floor of her bedroom with a gunshot wound to the chest. Because of the threats, Mt. Washington Police initially investigated her death as a possible homicide. But soon her family realized that Rachael committed suicide – the result, they believe, of cyber bullying.

"It was all anonymous," Mark Neblett said of the threats. "We do believe it was a person in her school because they knew every movement she made – at school, knew what route she took, where her locker was, even knew she went to vocational school, knew where she lived, what school bus she used to ride in.

"[The police] did tell me it was a juvenile,"

he said. "They knew exactly what computer it came from, what residence, and they didn't have enough evidence to actually prove that that person typed it in. Apparently there were too many people in the home."

A cause brought close to home

While traveling the state talking about cyber crime, Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway met Mark Neblett, who told him about Rachael.

"Mark Neblett told me he had no idea the amount of bullying and harassment his daughter, Rachael, experienced while visiting social-networking sites," Conway said. "Mark has made education and prevention about this issue his life's mission. His experience really made this issue hit home for me, and I mention Rachael at most presentations I conduct across the state."

In June, Conway reorganized the Attorney General's office and created a new branch – the Cybercrimes Division – to investigate crimes such as the one that led to Rachael's death.

"I am hearing from law enforcement officers that 80 percent of crimes are committed using



a computer and involve digital or computer forensics," Conway said upon announcing the new division. "It is imperative that we reach out to investigators across Kentucky to make sure they are discovering and preserving crucial evidence that could lead to the successful prosecution of cybercriminals, and that we are expediting the turn-around time of processing digital evidence."

But cyber bullying and stalking are not the only cases the division is targeting. All crimes that occur online, including predators soliciting children, scamming consumers and stealing identities are being investigated, said Allison Gardner Martin, communications director for Conway's office.

The Attorney General's office also will push for better laws relating to technology-based crimes as part of the new initiative, Martin said.

"I hope that we can prevent many of these crimes from occurring by educating citizens about the dangers lurking online," Conway said. "I want to bring our laws in Kentucky up to date with changes in technology."

While the six investigators in the Cybercrimes Division will be pursuing their own cases, Martin said the ambition is also to be a resource for law enforcement across the state dealing with the same issues.

"We have folks who are specialists in Internet predator stings," Martin said. "We have folks who are specialists in identity theft. But really, all of our officers are trained in cybercrimes in general. Everyone can do a little bit of everything. When you are dealing with resources like we have, you really need to be familiar with all of the different types of crime that will be coming through.

"I think that's what local law enforcement wants from us; to be a go-to person when they

need assistance" Martin said. "We will be doing our own investigations, but we are also there as a resource because we need their assistance, too, when we are working on a case. ... It is time for us to all put aside our differences and say, what can we do to help each other? What can we do to help make that dollar stretch further?"

Neblett is glad to see the work being done to help prevent another death like his daughter's, he said.

"This situation, it just tore a huge hole in our hearts," Neblett said. "As a parent they are supposed to be burying you instead of vice versa. I sometimes beat myself up not taking it to the police, but there was nothing there, no law, nothing to take any further. ... I want to look forward and what this unit is going to do to protect the citizens of the commonwealth is very – I'm just tickled pink about it, I'm so excited."

Internet crimes are a growing issue for police agencies not only in Kentucky, but across the nation. The statistics nationwide are staggering, Martin said.

"We know that one in seven children have been solicited online," Martin said. "Only 25 percent of those solicitations are reported to an adult or law enforcement and more than 80 percent of crimes that are committed involve digital or computer forensics."

Martin estimated that 1,000 identity thefts are committed annually in Kentucky with a national cost of about \$45 billion.

"It is really going to help," Neblett said of Conway's cybercrimes division. "It is going to send a message to these predators and these people that we mean business. It is time for them to be held accountable." J

Bullying Bill Guidelines

House Bill 91, also known as the "Bullying Bill" became effective on July 16. As required by that legislation, the Kentucky Department of Education has promulgated guidance to assist agencies in implementing its requirement. For copies of the guidelines, see <http://www.kde.state.ky.us/KDE>. Scroll down to "Guidelines for the Implementation of HB 91." ■

Cyber Crime Courses

Several new computer crime classes all hosted in cooperation with the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C)

Cybercop 210
Intermediate Data Recovery & Analysis
32 hr course

Cybercop 305
Windows NT File System
32 hr course

Cybercop 310
Windows NT Operating System
32 hr course

Cybercop 401
Linux File System for Forensic Examiners
36 hr course

Cyber Investigation ISEE
Instructor Development
16 hr course ■