

GERALD M. BAILEY
COMMISSIONER

News

Statewide Child Pornography Operation Nets 77 Arrests

Jun 09, 2009



TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist today was joined by Attorney General Bill McCollum, America’s Most Wanted host John Walsh, and Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Gerald Bailey to announce the results of a statewide operation to crack down on some of the state’s most egregious child pornographers. Authorities arrested 77 individuals on charges ranging from possession of child pornography to sexual battery during “Operation Orange Tree” – a 10-week collaborative effort among Florida’s law enforcement community.

“ Nothing is more important than keeping Florida’s children safe from cybercrime predators, and I applaud all of the law enforcement officers involved in Operation Orange Tree,” Governor Crist said. “ As a state, we must remain diligent in continuing the battle to stop sex offenders before they can prey on our children.”

During the investigation, law enforcement executed 90 search warrants and seized thousands of child pornography photos and videos. Five children who were subjects of child pornography or otherwise sexually victimized were rescued.

“Cooperation is the best way for law enforcement to fight child pornography,” said Attorney General McCollum. “I would love to see more state partnerships develop to maximize our resources.”

In many cases, investigators targeted individuals possessing large quantities of child pornography on their computer. Seventeen of the individuals arrested possessed a highly explicit video tutorial that law enforcement recently discovered circulating online. The video instructs users on methods to molest children ranging in age from infant to adolescent, and tips for avoiding detection.

“ Operation Orange Tree is a national model that I plan to take around the country to share with other states and other Governors,” said John Walsh. “ Today I am proud to be a Floridian. The cooperation that led to the arrest of these predators and Florida’s use of state-of-the art technology has pushed our state ahead in the battle to capture these individuals.”

Individuals arrested ranged from ages 17 to 83 and included two registered sex offenders. The operation ran primarily from mid-March through May, with arrests occurring as recently as this morning. A total of 23 agencies participated in the joint effort, with Polk County Sheriff’s Office making 45 of the arrests. In addition to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Office of the Attorney General, the following law enforcement agencies also participated:

- Bay County Sheriff’s Office
- Boynton Beach Police Department
- Broward County Sheriff’s Office (South Florida ICAC Task Force)
- Clearwater Police Department
- Collier County Sheriff’s Office
- Columbia County Sheriff’s Office
- Coral Springs Police Department
- Delray Beach Police Department
- Gainesville Police Department (North Florida ICAC Task Force)
- Immigration Customs Enforcement
- Innocent Images Task Force, Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Lake County Sheriff’s Office
- Lee County Sheriff’s Office
- Miami-Dade Police Department
- North Port Police Department
- Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office
- Polk County Sheriff’s Office (Central Florida ICAC Task Force)
- Punta Gorda Police Department
- Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office
- St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office
- United States Marshal’s Service

“ Florida is enhancing and fine-tuning the way we go about investigating these cyber predators,” Commissioner Bailey said. “ This should send a loud and clear message that our tactics and technologies will be aggressive and will always catch up with those who trade images of children being sexually violated.”

According to the Federal Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, Florida ranks fourth in the nation in volume of child

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pornography. On October 1, 2007, Governor Crist signed the CyberCrimes Against Children Act making Florida one of the leading states in the nation with laws against cybercrimes that target children. The new law increased penalties for cybercrimes, including the possession or distribution of child pornography online.

As Attorney General, Charlie Crist established the Child Predator/CyberCrime Unit in August 2005 in response to several tragic murders of children in Florida. The unit investigates and prosecutes computer-assisted crimes against children. The CyberCrime Unit now has 30 members and five offices statewide.

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