

# His 'Other' Job — Internet Safety Officer

Business

**H**E IS A MAN on a mission. For the past five years, Joseph N. Campolo, a lawyer and former Marine, has been waging a one-man campaign against child pornography on the Internet, and the predators and pedophiles who haunt the Internet for unwitting child victims.



**Manny Topol**

Armed with a laptop, and notes, and newspaper articles, he spends two or three Sundays a month lecturing to parent groups, youth and civic associations, or anyone else who will listen in churches, schools and libraries around Long Island, about the dark side of the Inter-

net. His lectures are aimed mainly at parents, whose children are usually more computer literate than they are.

He is not paid for his efforts, nor is he sponsored by any private company. He is a litigator with the East Meadow law firm of Certilman Balin Adler & Hyman. The firm has been supportive and encouraging of his efforts, but has not assigned him specifically to conduct the talks. He has been on his own. And he's busy.

When Campolo is not speaking to groups, or appearing on local television news programs or talk shows, he is researching the subject and compiling files, writing articles about child safety and the Internet, and creating pamphlets to hand out. He said he is not obsessed yet, but he's close. "It's community service for me, a mission," he said. "It keeps me busy intellectually as well as socially and morally."

It started while he was in law school at Fordham University. He attended a seminar sponsored by the Justice Department about computer crime.

"I was absolutely shocked at what I saw of child pornography and how it was proliferating on the Internet and how it was really so available," Campolo said.

There were also no laws against it at the time, and very little public interest. Campolo researched the topic for more than a year and wrote about it for the Fordham law journal.

While he was doing that, Congress made a deal with Internet service providers to drop criminal penalties out of a proposed bill to allow providers to incorporate parental controls into their services.

Campolo also devotes a good deal of his talks to the dangers of pedophiles who search the Internet, looking for young victims in chat rooms. There have been numerous cases of unwitting children who were cajoled over the Internet into meeting with un-



*Newsday / Dick Yarwood*

**Joseph N. Campolo**

bypass your alarm systems and go straight into your child's bedroom." According to a recent cover story in Newsweek magazine, the FBI opened 700 cases in 1998 dealing with online pedophilia. By last year, the figure had quadrupled to 2,856 cases. Campolo said a survey reported that one-third of all minors online get propositioned for sex through chat rooms.

"Honestly, and I know this may sound corny," Campolo said, "but it's the fact that I have a 3-year-old daughter and I just can't imagine ever being the parent in a situation where one day she would be missing because of somebody she met on the Internet." He brings a laptop to his talks to show parents what is available on the Internet, and what a chat room looks like.

Campolo, 33, believes his efforts are

known men and were then abused, kidnapped or murdered.

A Rockland County computer forensic investigator recently told a group of businesspeople that because of unmonitored use of the Internet, "pedophiles walk right through your front door,

having an impact. "I absolutely feel that I am making a difference," he said. "The nightly news is consumed with the stock market, but very little time is given to helping our children."

People are beginning to pay more attention to setting some controls over the use of the Internet, he said. But the legal road to getting something done has been filled with potholes.

In 1998, Congress approved the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which requires federally financed schools and libraries to use software that would filter out obscene materials on the Internet in their computers. The law is to go into effect this month.

However, the legislation faces a strong legal challenge from the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Library Association.

Critics say that the protection act violates the First Amendment and freedom of speech.

A U.S. District Court judge in Philadelphia granted a preliminary injunction against the law on Feb. 1. If the protection act is not overturned, schools and libraries could lose federal funds for Internet access if they do not install the filtering software by April 20.

Another proposed anti-child pornography law also faces a strong legal attack. The law, which seeks to outlaw computer-generated child pornography, has been challenged by the free-speech coalition. The case is scheduled to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court.