



Department of Justice

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2010
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MARYLAND MAN INDICTED FOR OPERATING A CHILD PORNOGRAPHY ONLINE BULLETIN BOARD

Case Resulted from a Two-Year International Investigation Called Operation Nest Egg

WASHINGTON - A federal grand jury in Greenbelt, Md., has indicted George Sell, 68, of Cumberland, Md., for advertising, transporting, receiving and possessing child pornography in connection with his operation of an online bulletin board in which members circulated images of child pornography and links to other child pornography websites.

The indictment, returned on Aug. 30, 2010, and unsealed today, was announced by Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division; U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein for the District of Maryland; Acting Postal Inspector in Charge Keith A. Fixel of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) - Washington Division; and Special Agent in Charge William Winter of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Office of Homeland Security Investigations.

According to the 10-count indictment, Country Lounge is a secure web-based bulletin board that at various times during the conspiracy was located on servers in Virginia and Texas, which advertised and offered for dissemination pictures and Internet web addresses directing members to secure websites depicting the sexual abuse of minors. A member could join this group only upon invitation and after approval by the group's administrators. To obtain access to Country Lounge, a member had to have a log-in username and password. Members were instructed by a specific set of rules and guidelines on how to post images using Country Lounge in order to avoid detection from law enforcement. As of August 2008, 142 members belonged to Country Lounge.

The indictment alleges that Sell managed the day-to-day operations of Country Lounge. From December 2006 to August 2008, Sell allegedly conspired with others to publish notices and advertisements on Country Lounge, seeking and offering to trade and distribute Internet web addresses directing members to websites depicting the sexual abuse of minors. Sell, along with other co-conspirators, allegedly arranged for and obtained different web host companies to host Country Lounge on computer servers maintained by members of the conspiracy, and decided and assigned a hierarchy of administrators and membership levels to Country Lounge members. Each level of membership contained different duties and responsibilities.

The indictment seeks forfeiture of Sell's home and any other property used to commit the alleged crimes.

Sell faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison for conspiracy to advertise child pornography; 20 years in prison for conspiracy to transport child pornography; 20 years in prison on each of the seven counts of receiving child pornography; and 10 years in prison on each of the two counts for possession of child pornography.

The charges announced today are merely accusations, and a defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in a court of law.

The charges against Sell are a result of "Operation Nest Egg," an ongoing and joint international investigation led by the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Indiana, USPIA and ICE. To date, as a result of Operation Nest Egg, more than 80 searches have been conducted in the United States. In total, more than 50 individuals have been arrested and 40 individuals have been convicted. The investigation is ongoing.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and CEOS, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Stacy Belf, and CEOS Trial Attorneys Darcy Katzin and Jennifer Toritto Leonardo. The case was investigated by the USPIA and ICE.

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