

JUSTICE NEWS

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Members of Long-Running International Child Pornography Ring Convicted

Two men have been convicted for their roles in a sophisticated conspiracy to distribute child pornography to a secret, world-wide network over the Internet.

Assistant Attorney General Leslie R. Caldwell of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, Acting U.S. Attorney Josh J. Minkler of the Southern District of Indiana and Acting Inspector in Charge Troy Raper of the United States Postal Inspection Service made the announcement.

John D. Gries 48, of Bayshore, New York, and James McCullars 56, of Huntsville, Alabama, were found guilty late Nov. 4, 2014, following a six-day jury trial of conspiracy to distribute and receive child pornography, conspiracy to advertise child pornography and engaging in a child exploitation enterprise in connection with a long-running, world-wide child exploitation enterprise.

According to testimony at trial, the enterprise began in 2000 and operated until April 2012. Gries and McCullars ran various online chat rooms available exclusively to members of the conspiracy and protected by password. These chat rooms were dedicated to the distribution, receipt and possession of child pornography, and were used by members to discuss and promote the sexual exploitation of children.

According to evidence at trial, as well as admissions by other defendants, today's defendants and many of the other members of the conspiracy amassed large collections of materials depicting child exploitation. The co-conspirators sought to expand their collections using online chat rooms and a number of online servers, and to evade law enforcement through the use of sophisticated data encryption software. Dozens of children around the world have been identified as victims of abuse during this investigation.

Other defendants charged as part of this investigation who have pleaded guilty or been found guilty include:

John Edwards, 62, of Indianapolis

Thomas Vaughn, 45, of Anderson, Indiana

John Rex Powell, 43, of Fort Myers, Florida

Donald Printup, 36, of Niagara Falls, New York

Michael Fredette, 46, of Waterford, New York

Robert Guillen, 43, of Wesley Chapel, Florida

David Bebetu, 51, of Agoura Hills, California

Stephen Harvey Dault, 48, of McKinney, Texas

Rick Ricardo Leon, 53, of Arlington, Virginia

Edwards, Fredette and Dault have been sentenced to 17.5 years in prison, 27 years in prison, and 17 years in prison respectively.

Powell was previously convicted as part of an investigation and prosecution of two Australian citizens who allegedly orchestrated the sexual abuse of their adopted son at the hands of men around the world. He is awaiting sentencing in that matter.

This case was the result of a collaborative investigation led by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service assisted by the Indiana Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and the Department of Justice's High Technology Investigative Unit, as part of Project Safe Childhood. This case is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Amy Larson of the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Division and Senior Litigation Counsel Steven D. DeBrotta of the Southern District of Indiana.

Led nationally by United States Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, 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.

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Criminal Division

Project Safe Childhood