Oakland County online crime detective: technology is a ‘double-edged sword’

Pictures of people convicted of crimes relating to technology hang at a door at the Oakland County Sheriff's Department's Computer Crime Unit office. Photo by Aftab Borka

By Aftab Borka, The Oakland Press

Posted: 10/22/14, 2:32 PM EDT | Updated: 3 secs ago

As much as they have helped people connect with friends and family members, internet based programs have also made it very easy for the bad guys to prey on their victims.

And no one in Oakland County knows is better than Detective Sergeant Darren Ofiara who leads the Sheriff’s Department’s Computer Crime Unit.

Since 2006, Ofiara says, their workload of investigating technology related crimes has increased over 2,000 percent.

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His four-member unit helps different agencies catch criminals stealing identities, committing financial fraud and, most importantly, abusing children.

In 2013, the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center, or IC3, received 262,813 consumer complaints which it estimated to have cost the victims over $780 million in losses.

In his four years with the unit, Ofiara says the biggest case he helped solve was arresting an Indiana-based based man who was later charged with coercing two teenage boys into making sexually explicit online videos. One of the boys was from Oakland County.

He said social media websites are making it easier for the online criminals to prey on their victims.

“Some people are open books online,” said Ofiara referring to people who share almost every personal piece of information on the internet. “You are risking anything.”

Ofiara said parents need to be extra careful when putting out information about their kids online.
“God forbid there’s someone who is trolling online and they are pedophile and they see your child,” he said. “The more (personal) information you put out the worst it can always be.”

Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard, who started the online crime investigation unit, said most of the technology-based crimes affecting the county residents are related to financial fraud.

In many cases people would either get emails or phone calls offering deals to steal people’s financial information.

“Unfortunately people are drawn in by what they think might be an amazing offer and it’s an amazing fraud,” said Bouchard.

He said the worst of these online crimes are cases of ‘sextortion’, where the victims, including juveniles, are lured into performing inappropriate acts on video and then later blackmailed.

One such case that Bouchard’s department helped solved was when a man from Dubai was sentenced to 26 years in 2011 for child pornography.

Although, technology is also helping Bouchard’s online crime unit in stopping criminals, Detective Ofiara says it is always better to take precautions.

And a word of advice from him to all parents is: “Keep your life as private as possible” and “by all means, don’t put your kids’ information on a place where it can be found by somebody else.”