

## Web site helps people locate registered sex offenders

By *BOB LINK, Of The Globe Gazette*

MASON CITY — Have you ever wondered if a sex offender lives in your neighborhood?

There are several ways of checking. Local law enforcement can tell you, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation's Web site can show you and people familiar with your neighborhood are likely to know.

A recently established Web site, <http://www.familywatchdog.us/>, also provides information on Iowa offenders and 44 other states.

Plug in your address and you get a map detailing your community, the locations where registered sex offenders live and where schools, parks and other landmarks are located.

The information includes a photo of the offender, the crime, sex and age range of the victim and distance the person lives from your doorstep.

Steve Roddel is the president and CEO of familywatchdog, a company based in Carmel, Ind.

A self-proclaimed "techno geek," Roddel said he was tired of hearing about 9-year-olds turning up dead at the hands of convicted sex offenders.

"It made sense to me," Roddel said. "Gather the information from as many states as possible and make it available on the Internet. If we can let people know where the registered sex offenders live, we should be able to reduce their opportunities to commit crimes."

The project started in April. After finishing Indiana's registry in a couple of days, he soon had 11 states on the Web site.

"I get all the information from the states," he said. "We harvest the information and in most cases the states are really good to work with."

But that isn't always the case. Roddel said some states are either not organized or have not made their registries a priority.

Familywatchdog has been endorsed by John Walsh, host of television's "America's Most Wanted," and Julie Clark, creator of Safe Side.

Roddel said the Web site also got national publicity when he was invited on the Oprah Winfrey show.

“I didn’t build this to be a business,” he said. “But now I have some of the best technology people in the country, in various fields, working with me.”

Steven Conlon, assistant director of the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, the agency in charge of the Iowa Sex Offender Registry, said Web sites like familywatchdog are very popular and provide good information.

“We are also in the process of updating our mapping system,” Conlon said.

Roddel said Iowa’s officials have been very helpful in obtaining the needed information.

Both the familywatchdog site, <http://www.familywatchdog.us/>, and the Iowa DCI site, <http://www.iowasexoffenders.com/>, state that there may be additional offenders that cannot be properly displayed on the site.