

FUGITIVES CAPTURED **1067**  
 CHILDREN FOUND **117**

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# VICTIMS' ADVOCATE

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## Monitoring At-Risk Students (M.A.R.S.)

A school-based program that's out of this world



by JSO Assistant Chief David L. Stevens

Parents send their children to school every day expecting them to be safe and to have an environment conducive to learning. Because of several recent high profile incidents, some parents question if all that can be done is being done. Those include a Jacksonville child's beating, caught on the bus videotape, a Miami 14-year-old middle school child murdered in the school bathroom when his throat was cut, and a Clay County student who was sucker-punched and later died.

Schools are among the safest places a child can be outside the home, but perception is reality and many parents feel that schools can be made safer. That is why the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office and the Duval County School System work together to ensure that the reduction of violence, the threat of violence and the fear of violence is a high priority. The School Resource Officer is a tremendous tool to public high schools and middle schools, but a new program makes them even more valuable.

The M.A.R.S. (Monitoring At-Risk Students) Program is an intervention tool used by the SROs to make early identification of disruptive students and to provide prompt, effective intervention strategies to "break the cycle" of unacceptable behavior. SROs are required to give individual attention to children identified through their disruptive or unacceptable behavior that makes the top five (from a list of 25) at their particular school. SROs are required to counsel these children to determine if there may be an underlying issue that is causing this poor behavior and to guide the child in the right direction such as school intervention programs or other services offered by outside city agencies.

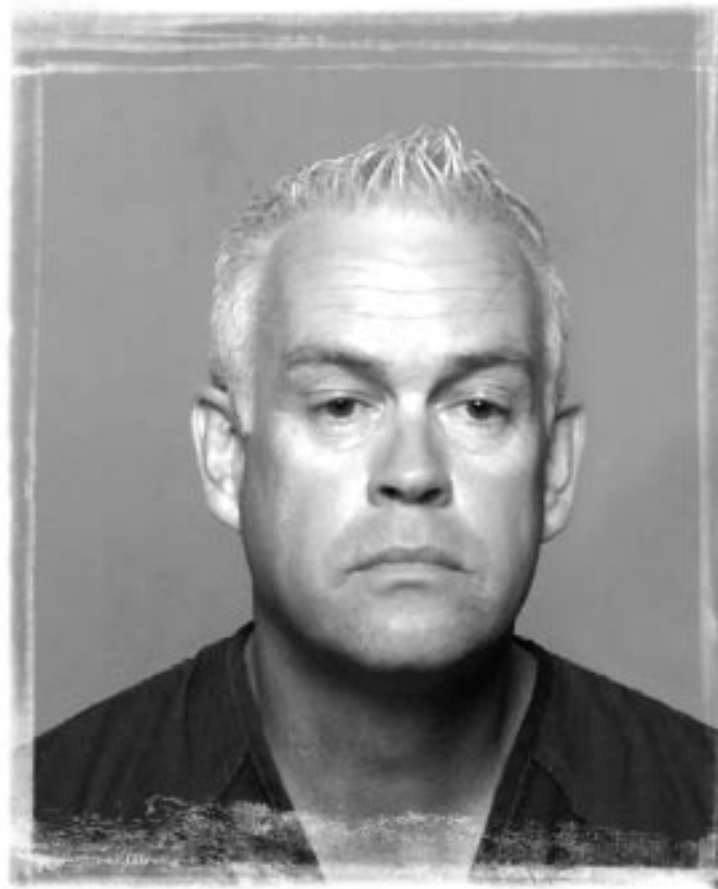
In a 2000 report issued by the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, law enforcement officers were recognized as being in a unique position to play an important role in the early identification of "at-risk" youth. The report went on to say that "programs and approaches that take advantage of this position and provide a clear mechanism for linking at-risk youth to services in the community show great promise for preventing delinquency." The M.A.R.S. Program does just that, and our long-range goal is that we will prevent youth from entering the criminal justice system and turn kids around who may be on the cusp of facing an arrest that could possibly be prevented through early intervention.

This program takes an aggressive and pro-active approach to meeting the challenges of disruptive behavior head-on through positive intervention with kids and their parents. Since school began in August, SROs through all M.A.R.S. contacts have had 21,717 conferences with students, conducted parental conferences 5,846 times and actually visited the home of the students 764 times! The program has also shown very good results because as the number of conferences by the SROs has increased, the number of referrals (discipline problems) has decreased.

We can make a difference in children's lives, and Sheriff Rutherford is willing to take bold new approaches to ensure we do not let any children "slip through the cracks."

## The Hijacking of Justice

Triple child molester serves only eight months



Stephen Lee Edmonds

During a family vacation in April 2002, we received a call from a friend, reporting that our neighbor, Steve Edmonds, was caught soliciting sex on the computer, witnessed by three boys at his home. Edmonds had sent messages to his son (a classmate of Edmonds' son at Bolles School) discussing sex, directing him to commit sexual acts on himself then come back and describe them. Our friend said, "You need to talk to your children." He then reported the incident to the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

Frantically, I called to my 14-year-old son. When I asked him what he knew about Edmonds, he shrugged indifferently. My other son initially would not admit any improper behavior by Edmonds. Our children knew we had concerns about

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## 'Johns' Cost The Community Millions

The Economic Impact of Prostitution on Jacksonville

By Cindy Graves

Many people think of a john as a low-class soul out to pleasure himself with whatever money he can scrape together. The harsh reality is that many johns actually drive the economy of prostitution. They may be family men from middle- to upper-class suburbs who attend church on Sunday and soccer games on Saturday and have the resources to spend

By all accounts, 300 to 500 men, some of them considered community leaders, cost Jacksonville taxpayers big bucks each year in their illicit pursuit of sex. They not only facilitate increased levels of disease and incarceration costs, contribute to urban blight and tear down the very economy which many of them seek to build up in their public lives, but they provide financial support to the drug trade in Jacksonville as surely as if they pushed the rocks of crack cocaine themselves.

between \$10 and \$500 for the services of a prostitute.

Sergeant John Anderson, who heads up the Organized

Crime Division of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, estimates there are between 300

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