

Hijacking Justice...

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Edmonds' attempts to fraternize with male children, especially after our 11-year-old nephew detailed an event in the summer of 2001, saying Edmonds had touched him improperly. After spending an afternoon in the boat with Edmonds and his children, my nephew came home and said, "Your neighbor rubbed my neck, shoulder and back and grabbed my butt - he is a pervert."

Edmonds strategically cloaked his evil side by associations with prominent citizens, most of whom had no idea of his lust for boys. His social circle included relatives of his spouse, a former Jacksonville mayor, a former city councilwoman and her husband, who is a judge. He

was also a deacon at a prominent Baptist church. Edmonds effectively used his financial means to gain influence in this community and thus gain parents' trust.

After our sons discussed this matter with an attorney, they revealed the "perverted and disgusting conversations," instant messages and sexual molestations Edmonds had committed on them for years.

JSO Detectives Steve Strickland and Tommy Herrington set up a sting and obtained overwhelming evidence for a solid case. The information was turned over to the State Attorney's office and a warrant was issued for Edmonds' arrest relating to one victim. The officers are to be

commended for their efforts and the apprehension of this serial pedophile.

Six JSO officers went to Edmond's residence and spent hours questioning him. He was shown computer messages and listened to a wiretapped phone call of his voice admitting to the felonies. He admitted that he sent the messages and that he had inappropriately groped the boy.

When Edmonds' wife came home after being away several hours, she blasted him, shouted that he was "a liar" and told him "to tell the truth." She left the room, made a phone call, returned and told Steve to "shut up and quit talking." The officers arrested Edmonds and seized three computers including one at his office. As the officers departed, Officer Woods heard Dana Edmonds exclaim, "It's starting all over again, just like five years ago."

The next day's news reported that Stephen Lee Edmonds, president of Northeast Florida Builder's Association and owner of the Edmonds Company (he later changed the name to Classic American Homes), had been arrested for child molestation. He was a former assistant baseball coach at Bolles School, a former resident assistant at the Bolles boys' dormitory, a baseball coach at San Jose Athletic Association

and also had been involved with teen ministry and college mentoring at his church.

Three nights after his arrest, though ordered by Judge Cole not to be around minors, Edmonds was at the Steak and Shake parking lot near the Regal Cinema among 100 teenagers.

In the following weeks, five more boys went to authorities to report sexual felony crimes against minors. Though the State Attorney's office had proof Edmonds molested five boys, Assistant State Attorney Libby Senterfitt only charged him with three. There was never a convincing explanation why he was not charged for molesting the other two boys. Collectively, the five boys painted a damning picture for any judge and jury.

Edmonds was re-arrested on April 26 and charged with molesting two more boys. On his way to jail he asked, "Which boys are they?" Detective Strickland replied, "Suppose you tell us." Edmonds didn't respond. He was ordered to post bond of \$103,000; however, after Edmond's attorney appeared before Judge McCaulie the next day, the judge reduced the bond to \$10,000.

Edmonds' formal charges included 13 felony counts - ten second-degree lewd and lascivious molestations and three third-degree felonies including showing hardcore

pornography and transmitting harmful material to minors.

In August, Ms. Senterfitt discussed a plea sentencing range between six months and fifteen years. We told her that six months was unacceptable and stated in a plea agreement that we expected Edmonds to confess to the two most egregious molestations charges and the pornography or internet charges. When I asked my son which was the worst, he described an incident he had not yet reported. It was the same identical incident two of the other boys had experienced from Edmonds.

I asked Ms. Senterfitt to interview my son and add the charge. She refused. She said, "He (Edmonds) is loaded up; it's one of the same charges he already has." I said, "It is a different child and my son said it was the worst act." I asked her to record it in her file. I later asked a renowned criminal lawyer if there was any justification for that charge not being added. He said, "Absolutely not. She could have and should have added the charge."

Bill Sheppard, the defendant's attorney, used every stalling tactic he could employ, successfully sealing from the public evidence the state possessed. As Judge McCaulie

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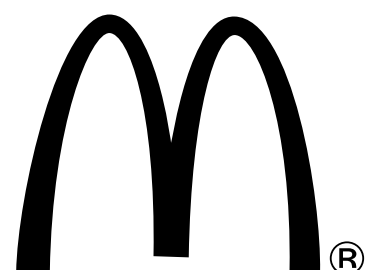
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