



*Bill
McCollum*



Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred Lewis gives the oath of office to newly elected Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum.

A Message from Florida's **Attorney General**

Child Predator CyberCrime Unit

As Florida's Attorney General, one of my responsibilities is to ensure that Florida is a safe place to live, work and raise a family. As a father, I know how important it is to protect our families and our children from those who would prey on their innocence. Internet predators are a huge threat to the safety of our state and our people. They are insidious, infiltrating our homes from the relative safety of our living rooms and our computers.

The Child Predator CyberCrime Unit was established to focus on the growing problem of crimes committed via the internet, particularly against children. CyberCrime investigators conduct covert investigations online and target individuals who prey on children as well as those who pollute the internet with images of child pornography. Since its inception, the unit has

been directly responsible for 34 arrests, some for the creation, possession or distribution of child pornography and others for sexually soliciting children over the internet.

A study by the Crimes Against Children Research Center several years ago indicated that at least 24 million children between the ages of 10 and 17 use the internet regularly. One out of every five of these children received a sexual solicitation; one in every four received unwanted pictures of naked people or people having sex; one in every 17 was threatened or harassed; and one in every 33 received an aggressive sexual solicitation asking the recipient to meet, phone or accept gifts. Child pornography, a growing cancer on the internet, is a crime so heinous in nature that it revictimizes every time it is viewed or distributed.

The CyberCrime Unit's mission statement directs it to protect children from computer-facilitated sexual exploitation. Members of the unit do this by working cooperatively on a statewide basis with law enforcement agencies and prosecutors to provide resources and expertise, while preventing the spread of these crimes through education and community awareness. The Attorney General's Child Predator CyberCrime Unit is a member of the North Florida Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, a federally funded program working nationwide to educate and support law enforcement to stop internet crime against children.

Computer-facilitated crimes are not limited to child pornography or sexual solicitation. Today's tech-savvy criminals are using the internet and other computer resources to invade people's homes and steal their names, their financial information and other personal identification information. In 2005, Florida ranked sixth in the nation for identity theft, with more than 17,000 victims. This crime paralyzes its victims, stealing not only their money, but their good name.

Our office has targeted identity theft as a serious problem in Florida and is taking special measures to educate and protect Florida consumers. A victim's "tool kit" is available on the Attorney General's website, providing victims with several resources that give specific instructions for filing a police report and beginning to clear their names. Additionally, the Attorney General's office is committed to working with Florida's law enforcement community to stamp out this pervasive crime. Current laws exist that impose harsh penalties for identity theft with special consumer protection initiatives, including the requirement that businesses must maintain computerized data that includes personal information to provide notice whenever they experience breaches of system security.

While keeping Floridians safe from scam artists and conmen inside their homes is important, our citizens' safety in their communities and their neighborhoods also holds substantial significance. Gang violence is among my top priorities for this office, one I will not take lightly. It is my understanding that Florida is home to nearly 1,000 gangs with more than 65,000 members and associates. Clearly, this problem cannot be ignored, but must be addressed with

determination and resolve. I intend to work closely with the law enforcement community to offer my assistance and available resources to not only prevent young children from joining gangs, but also to help those already involved with gangs to escape their influence.

We live in an amazing state. With a unique geography, diverse cultures, over 18 million residents and more than 83 million visitors each year, keeping our citizens and guests safe is a tremendous challenge. Whether we are protecting our children from internet pedophilia, shielding individuals from identity theft or cracking down on gang violence and crime, your Attorney General's Office will remain dedicated and involved. This state is my home, and I pledge to protect it. ●

Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

This month, I had the honor of recognizing some of Florida's most courageous and dedicated public servants—the men and women in law enforcement who put their lives on the line daily to keep us and our loved ones safe. Every year, one officer is honored as the Attorney General's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year. Our office is proud to recognize excellence in the field of law enforcement, because ensuring that Florida is a safe place to live, work and raise a family is my top priority.

This year, thirteen officers traveled to Tallahassee for the ceremony naming this year's award recipient. They brought friends, family and fellow law enforcement officers to share in their recognition for excellence and exceptional performance on the job. It was a truly humbling experience to stand in a room with these dedicated public servants who truly love their jobs protecting the citizens of this great state.

Of the officers nominated for special recognition, one man in particular stood above the rest. **Detective Sergeant James R. Contento**, a 27-year veteran of the Tampa Police Department, received the 2006 Attorney General's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award.

Detective Contento was nominated for a program he coordinated with Tampa mall managers and retailers to target holiday crime. He coordinated a team of patrol officers including undercover, crime prevention, bicycle and mounted patrol officers to work with managers and retailers, reducing reported crimes by 65 percent over the previous year.

As I introduced each officer and read his or her individual commendation, I was reminded once again how fortunate we are as Floridians to have such talented, well-trained and devoted men and women watching out for our safety. Before me were individuals who had saved hostages, rescued drowning victims, initiated public safety programs and oversaw huge wildlife preserves. Every nominee for the award came with extraordinary qualifications.

Unfortunately, the ceremony was set against a somber backdrop. Just days before, Florida lost an exemplary public servant in the line of duty. **Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Nicholas Sottile** was a well-respected 24-year veteran of the patrol, a dedicated public servant and a good man. What started off as a routine traffic stop quickly became a senseless tragedy, robbing our state of a man who gave his life to ensure public safety.

The mission every officer undertakes is dangerous and stressful. It takes a special person to don a uniform and gun, knowing he or she may be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice. Last year, eight of Florida officers preceded Sergeant Sottile in sacrificing their lives for our safety. His death is yet another chilling reminder that as Floridians, we must not take for granted the invaluable service provided by our law enforcement community and the risks they take every day.

As Florida's Attorney General, public safety is my top priority. These officers and their thousands of fellow law enforcement officers have my heartfelt gratitude for their hard work and dedication.

Editor's Note: Detective Sergeant James R. Contento has been a PBA member since 1981. PBA congratulates him on being chosen as Law Enforcement Officer of the Year! ●

IRS FACT SHEET:

TT-2007-15

Taxpayers Have Until April 17 to File & Pay

WASHINGTON — Taxpayers across the nation will have until Tuesday, April 17, 2007, to file their 2006 returns and pay any taxes due, the IRS announced January 24th.

Taxpayers will have extra time to file and pay because April 15 falls on a Sunday in 2007, and the following day, Monday, April 16, is Emancipation Day, a legal holiday in the District of Columbia.

"This year, taxpayers have additional time to file and pay beyond the traditional April 15 deadline," said IRS Commissioner Mark W. Everson. "As we always do, we encourage taxpayers to get an early start on their taxes to make sure they have plenty of time to accurately prepare their return."

Tax-filing and payment requirements affected by this change are described in IRS Publication 509, Tax Calendars for 2007, available at the IRS website at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p509.pdf

By law, filing and payment deadlines that fall on a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday are timely satisfied if met on the next business day. Under a federal statute enacted decades ago, holidays observed in the District of Columbia have impact nationwide on tax issues, not just in D.C. Under recently-enacted city legislation, April 16 is a holiday in the District of Columbia. Officials recently became aware of the intersection of the national filing day and the local observance of the new Emancipation Day holiday after most forms and publications for the current tax filing season went to print.