

## EXPERT TO HOST FORUM ON CYBER CRIME

As communications technology advances, it is now possible to interact in ways that were not possible just a few years ago. Although there are many advantages to these advances, there are dangers, too.

The Otsego County Circuit Court and the Superintendent of Gaylord Community Schools are holding a special forum to discuss some of these dangers. The event is sponsored by the American Association of University Women, Gaylord Area Branch.

The event will take place on Thursday, December 2, 2010, at 6:30 p.m. in the Gornick Auditorium.

Patrick Corbett, a professor of law, will serve as expert guest speaker for the event, which has been designed specifically for parents. Corbett served as a federal prosecutor for 10 years, functioning as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. In 1999, he joined the Michigan Attorney General's Office to help start the High Tech Crime Unit.

He served as the deputy chief of that unit for over two years, investigating and prosecuting internet and computer related crimes.

Now, in addition to teaching at Cooley Law School, Corbett talks with students, parents and educators throughout Michigan about the state's cyber crimes laws.

In this forum, Corbett will address ideas on how to prevent kids from engaging, wittingly or unwittingly, in cyber crimes by helping clarify what types of activities may constitute criminal conduct.

Aside from awareness of these laws, he will also talk about the importance of diligent communication between parents and youth.

Corbett comes to the local community through a sponsorship of the American Association of University Women, Gaylord Area Branch.

With the advent of cell phones, it is possible to stay in touch virtually anywhere and at any time. These devices can now be used for texting, taking pictures, and browsing the internet.

Meanwhile, internet communication has been revolutionized by social networking web sites such as Facebook and Myspace.

With all of these technologies, social networking opportunities have grown exponentially compared to what was available a generation ago. In many cases, kids are much more adept at using these technologies than parents.

Unfortunately, it is possible for social networking tools such as Facebook and Myspace to lead to incidences of bullying and even the subjection of kids to predatory behaviors. According to the Otsego County Circuit Court, parents don't always realize when kids are doing things that could harm them or damage their futures.

Not all parents are aware of what qualifies as prohibited conduct, which can make it difficult to warn kids about how to stay out of trouble.

The circuit court reports that, on both state and national levels, for kids ranging from sixth grade and up, "cell phones and computers are quickly vaulting our youth into situations that can hurt their futures".

On behalf of the circuit court and the Gaylord Community Schools, Judge Janet M. Allen and Superintendent Cheryl Wojtas have endeavored to advise parents of a danger that is often unperceived until serious damage has been done.

"As our youth travel through adolescence, with all the enthusiasm and curiosity that come with it, we don't want them to harm themselves or others," said Judge Janet Allen. "This

becomes an issue because they have at their disposal technology that has a much broader reach than they can imagine.”

Michigan has various criminal laws that can be triggered by kids and computer use.

Because of the technology involved, Michigan courts consider the use of a cell phone as computer use. Therefore, use of cell phones in a manner which runs afoul of the prohibited communications statutes may constitute a criminal act.

An additional concern about how communication technology may propel kids into criminal conduct is that certain communications may actually land them on the sexual offender registry.

“Thus, this technology, while seemingly innocent enough, has the potential to victimize kids, both on the receiving and sending end,” said Allen. All parents are welcome to attend.