

PARENTING

Keeping kids safe on the Internet

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

This access provides unlimited educational opportunities for the students and teachers. Along with this access, there is the potential that information on the Internet may be illegal, inflammatory, inaccurate and morally offensive.

The words above are taken from a contract the diocesan Department of Catholic Schools requires parents to sign before students can use the Internet at its schools. The passage speaks well to the pros and cons of Internet usage by children.

Liz Krayer, computer instructor at Rochester's St. John the Evangelist School, noted that the school takes several steps to ensure that children do not run afoul of the Internet. In addition to the parental contract, she noted that software filters are installed on the school computers to block pornographic Web sites and other inappropriate content. Krayer added that the computers also are situated in the school so that it's "very easy to keep an eye on what's going on."

However, not all venues where the Internet can be accessed are this foolproof. This point was brought home last month when, according to published reports, a mother of a young boy complained that her son had witnessed a man viewing pornographic images on a computer at the Penfield Public Library. The incident gained national attention on Dr. Laura Schlessinger's syndicated radio show, and the Monroe County Library System announced it plans to limit such incidents by installing a filter in all of its libraries by July 1.

Yet the most frequent problems regarding the Internet and children tend to occur right at home or at the home of a friend. "Who knows what they're getting into? I have no idea," Krayer said of children using computers outside of school property.

"We would strongly encourage parents to have a filtering system, and have the computer be in a public area of the home such as the kitchen or living room, so children do not have private access in their bedroom," said Sister of St. Joseph Patricia Carroll, an assistant superintendent in the diocesan schools office. Sister Carroll, who is responsible for education technol-



James Stein/Photo Intern

St. John the Evangelist fourth-graders Lauren Keppler (left) and Chelsie DeBaise use the Internet to search for poems during class April 10.

ogy, added that the diocese attempts to teach students "responsible decision making" for their use of home computers.

Responsible decision making apparently is not a given, according to a survey recently released by the Girl Scout Research Institute. The report, "The Net Effect: Girls and New Media," found that 30 percent of respondents — all girls between the ages of 13 and 18 — said they had been sexually harassed in an Internet chat room. But only a small percentage had told their parents of such activity, fearing they would lose their computer privileges. More than 40 percent of those surveyed said they knew how to secretly access pornographic sites.

The Girl Scouts' Web site (www.girlscouts.org) provides more infor-

mation about the survey and also offers 10 tips to help parents reduce the possibility of harmful Internet use by their children. Sara Au, spokesperson for Girl Scouts of the USA, told the *Catholic Courier* that most of these recommendations apply to boys as well. Among them are suggestions that parents:

- Discuss with your child how much time can be spent online and what kind of sites are visited.
- Know what your child, and your child's friends, are doing online.
- Familiarize yourself with the Internet and all that can be accessed on it.
- Keep an open dialogue with your child about the Internet.
- Emphasize that the Internet can be a positive tool, not just a dangerous one.

Family Events

● **APR. 21, 28** — **Laser light show:** "American Music in Laser Light," Strasenburgh Planetarium, 657 East Ave., Rochester, 3 p.m.; \$5 adults, \$4 students & seniors, \$2 RMSC members; 585/271-1880.

● **SAT, APR. 27** — **Dental health fair:** entertainment, crafts, family activities; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; Gary the Happy Pirate, 12:30 & 3 p.m.; play "Count Me In!", 1:30 p.m.; \$6 adults, \$5 ages 2-17 & seniors, under 2 free; 585/263-2700.

● **SUN, APR. 28** — **Fun Family Flicks:** "Explorers"; Dryden Theatre, George Eastman House, 900 East Ave., Rochester, 2 p.m.; \$5 adults, \$2 children, \$8 families (one adult and up to four children); 585/271-3361, ext. 218.

● **THRU APR. 28** — **Exhibit:** "History Through Deaf Eyes"; 60-panel show places the social history of deaf Americans within the context of better-known aspects of American history; Bausch Hall, Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; Mon.-Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m.; \$7 adults, \$6 seniors & college students, \$5 ages 3-18, under 3 free; 585/271-1880.

● **FRI, MAY 3** — **Walking tours:** of downtown Rochester; tour local & natural history sites; meet at City Hall, 30 Church St., Rochester; noon-12:50 p.m. or 4:45-6 p.m.; \$5; all Fridays in May; call Mariana 585/271-7368.

● **MAY 8, 14** — **Days for Tots:** for preschoolers; Wed., May 8: Mrs. McPuppet; Tues., May 14: The Dinner Dogs; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; 9:30 a.m.; \$6 adults, \$5 children, under 12 months free; advance ticket purchase recommended; 585/263-2701, ext. 314.

● **THRU JUNE 16** — **Exhibit:** Edgerton Model Train Exhibit; free tours; Edgerton Community Center, 41 Backus St. at Phelps St., Rochester; Tuesdays 7-8 p.m., Sundays 12:30 p.m.; 585/428-6769.

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