

Alleged child pornographer heads to trial

Wesley Pickard faces 97 counts of sexual exploitation

By Kadi Hodges
Times-News

A Graham man is scheduled to stand trial beginning today on 97 counts of sexually exploiting children.

Wesley Tate Pickard's charges include taking indecent liberties with a child, sexual exploitation of a minor, and statutory rape.

The 43-year-old Pickard has been held in the Alamance County jail under a \$1 million bond since his arrest in September.

There are seven alleged victims, male and female, who range in age from 3 to 15. The alleged incidents took place between 2002 and 2004 in Pickard's trailer on Darrell Drive.



Pickard

Search warrants executed around the time of Pickard's arrest indicate police seized video equipment, about 75 videotapes, computers and disks, CDs, toys, costumes, and over-the-counter children's medicine.

Pickard's attorney, Daniel Monroe, filed a motion to suppress evidence

that was seized using the search warrants. He contended that the warrants were not executed properly and they used inaccurate information.

Officers say seized videotapes show children engaging in sexual acts on Pickard's bed, close-up shots of a child's body, and Pickard engaging in sexual acts with toddlers who appear to be sleeping.

A physician who reviewed that tape opined that those children were likely drugged.

Investigators said at the time of Pickard's arrest that they believed he was creating child pornography and disseminating it on the Internet.

In 1992 Pickard was charged with two counts of taking indecent liberties with a child. In 1994 his case went to court, but the jury failed to reach a verdict, and the judge declared a mistrial.

Kadi Hodges can be reached at kadi_hodges@link.freedom.com

Nature's little surprises

Grandfather Mountain had 5 inches of snow

The Associated Press

LINVILLE — A weather system that brought up to a foot of rare spring snowfall to the Midwest swiped its tail across western North Carolina, dropping one to seven inches of powder in the mountains.

By midday Sunday, five inches of snow had fallen on Grandfather Mountain near Linville, and accumulations reached half a foot near the northern Tennessee line, according to National Weather Service (NWS) meteorologist Anita Silverman.

"It ranges anywhere from just around an inch close to the foothills to six to seven inches by the Tennessee line," Silverman, from the NWS office in Blacksburg, Va., said. "Mostly it's the ridgetop and the higher elevations that have gotten the higher amounts."

More was expected as the day progressed, and the weather service issued a snow advisory for the northern North Carolina mountains through Sunday evening.

"It could be another inch of new snow before it starts to pull out," Silverman said.

On Grandfather Mountain, the low dropped to 16 degrees overnight and winds reached 139 mph. Average April snowfall at the mountaintop weather station is 3.78 inches, but this month's total has reached 10.25 inches.

High temperatures for the region were running about 25 degrees below normal for this time of year — more than a month after the first day of spring — and similarly unseasonable cold was reported across the state Sunday.

"It's pretty unusual," Silverman said. "It's getting late enough in the year that it's significantly below normal temperatures."



Trail runners, from right, Mark Ledyard, Frankie Adkins, Jim Hoer, and Tim Grotenhuis take to the Mountains-to-Sea trail from Bull Gap along the Blue Ridge Parkway Sunday as an unusual spring snowfall arrives in Asheville.

The Associated Press

U.S. prisons swell by nearly 900 each week

By Siobhan McDonough
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Growing at a rate of about 900 inmates each week between mid-2003 and mid-2004, the nation's prisons and jails held 2.1 million people, or one in every 138 U.S. residents, the government reported Sunday.

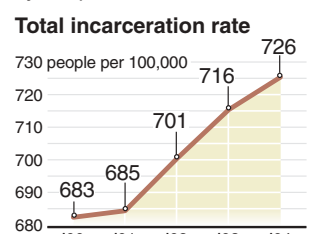
By last June 30, there were 48,000 more inmates, or 2.3 percent, more than the year before, according to the latest figures from the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

The total inmate population has hovered around 2 million for the past few years, reaching 2.1 million on June 30, 2002, and just below that mark a year later.

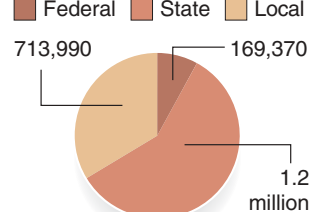
While the crime rate has fallen over the past decade, the number of people in prison and jail is outpacing the number of inmates released,

Prisoner rates rise

The rate of people incarcerated in the U.S. has steadily increased since 2000. Federal prisoners increased in population by 6.3 percent in 2004.



Prisoners in custody, 2004



Percent change, 2003-04
Federal: 6.3%, State: 3.3%, Local: 1.3%

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SOURCE: Department of Justice AP

FEMA workers not all they seem

Investigation finds felons, embezzlers

By Megan O'Matz and Sally Kestin
Knight Ridder News Service

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Government inspectors entrusted to enter disaster victims' homes and verify damage claims include criminals with records for embezzlement, drug dealing and robbery, a South Florida Sun-Sentinel investigation has found.

Federal officials have pointed to the inspectors as their primary defense against accusations of widespread fraud for their payout of more than \$31 million in Hurricane Frances disaster aid in Miami-Dade — a county spared hurricane-force winds.

In a January news conference, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) insisted there was damage in Miami-Dade County.

"We know this for several reasons," said Dan Craig, FEMA's director of recovery programs. "Foremost among them is that FEMA's contract

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Following the 5-second rule

By Esther Landhuis
Knight Ridder News Service

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Having skipped lunch, you're devouring a bag of Doritos between afternoon meetings when the last chip tumbles to the floor. Do you chomp it or chuck it? Quick! You've got only a few seconds to decide.

That is, if you follow the "five-second rule" — a piece of folk wisdom that says it's OK to eat food off the ground as long as it's salvaged within five seconds.

Even those of us who religiously buy organic, cook from scratch and scorn fast food are among the legions who occasionally invoke the rule. And most moms can handily snatch

The "rule": It's ok to eat food off the ground when picked up in 5 seconds.

a tidy morsel off the floor in less than five seconds.

"We use the five-second rule all the time unless the surface is really dirty," said Amy Polcyn, a San Jose, Calif., mother with three children 6 and younger. "If the kids drop food in a public restroom, there's no way they're going to eat it — I don't care how short it was on the floor — but if they drop it at home, not a big deal. Pick it up and eat it."

But are you risking your health — or your family's — if

you grab that chocolate chip cookie off the tile floor?

Two years ago, during a pre-college summer stint in a microbiology lab at the University of Illinois, Jillian Clarke decided to find out.

In a survey of 100 people at the university, she found that 63 percent had heard of the five-second rule. The majority of those admitted to applying the tenet, most often to dropped cookies and candy. And women slightly outpaced men in their willingness to eat off the floor.

"A lot of people were really honest," said Clarke, who had just finished her junior year of high school when she did

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Passion for volunteering

In the 1960s, Marvin Comer and his associates developed and patented nine hosiery products, including the elastic yarn used in support stockings.

Those patents were just a few of his accomplishments. Lately, he seems to spend a lot of time collecting honors.

On May 9, the retired textile executive will return as honorary chairman of the annual Hospice League of Alamance-Caswell Golf Classic.

It's a role he had at the first tournament in 1990. But he said he won't play in this year's fund-raiser tourney.

"I fell four years ago and broke my hip, so I don't play anymore," said Comer, who played golf during much of the 20th Century and has three hole-in-one shots on his record, plus numerous trophies.

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Peter Schumacher / Times-News

Marvin Comer played in the first Hospice golf classic and will return as honorary chairman this year.