

Happy Easter from...

# The Town Common

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## Staying Safe in an Online World

By Theresa DeFranzo,  
Reporter

GEORGETOWN - Josh Gunderson has a lot of advice to give to students about staying safe in the online world.

However, after hearing him speak, he sums it up this way: Think about your future.

An award-winning director, Gunderson is a speaker who travels to middle and high schools with his presentation of "Hooked on Facebook", an in-depth look at the pros and cons of social networking on the Internet. Last week he was in Georgetown. During the day he gave two presentations -- one to the middle school students and one to the high school students. That night

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## Rowley Nurse Helps Haiti

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter



Cindy Gavin, in her living room in Rowley, treasures some of the items she bought from the street entrepreneurs in Minot, Haiti.

Photo by Stewart Lytle

ROWLEY - It took Cindy Gavin days to get to and from the remote town of Milot in northern Haiti, but only minutes to decide to disrupt her

life as a nurse who specializes in vascular treatment at the Melrose-Wakefield Hospital and provide expert care for the earthquake victims.

"We had a message from the hospital about volunteering to go to Haiti and then there was a meeting on a Monday. I was in, right then," Gavin said. The Hallmark Health Systems, which owns Melrose-Wakefield Hospital, sponsored the international care mission.

Gavin, a Rowley resident, and another nurse, Henry Azzun, flew to Miami on March 5th, then to Turks & Caicos and finally to Haiti. They joined a team of 25 other health care professionals from New England, Rochester, NY, Jacksonville, FL and Denver, CO in treating earthquake victims that had been bused from the devastated capital of Port-au-Prince to the Hospital Sacre Coeur in the rural community of Milot.

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## Staying Safe in an Online World

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he gave his presentation to parents.

One point he hit on again and again to the students was to think about your future. "Do a flash forward five years," he said.

When you go to apply for a job or apply to your dream college, there will be people who will look at your Facebook account to see if you are the kind of employee or student they want representing their business or college. A picture you take as a teenager of you drinking and partying could come back to haunt you, Gunderson said.

He gave the same advice to students when it comes to "sexting". He gave this true example to hammer home his point. A 14- and 15-year-old girl sent inappropriate photos of themselves to some 16-year-old boys. In an unrelated matter, their cell phones were confiscated and the photos discovered. The girls were charged with manufacturing child pornography and the boys were charged with possession of child pornography.

While none of the teenagers faced any jail time, Gunderson said they are all now registered sex offenders.

Another problem with online social networking sites is that they have become a place to bully people 24/7. Most

people are familiar with the story of 15-year-old Phoebe Prince. She is the South Hadley student who was cyberbullied and then committed suicide, some say as a result of cyberbullying. This is one of the reasons why PTA President Barbie Linares wanted to have Gunderson talk with students and parents.

"These days internet safety is on the minds of so many, especially with the most recent tragedies that have occurred in our state and around the country," Linares said. "The PTA recognizes that we as adults need to be educated in order to educate our children about the importance of respecting the internet and using it in the proper way. We are fortunate that our success in fundraising allows us to bring these great events to our community, and for that we are thankful to all who support our efforts."

So just what can parents do to keep their kids safe? Gunderson had some advice. He said that parents "should have a conversation early on and talk about the rules for the cell phone and the computer."

He handed out sample contracts that parents and kids can sign after they come up with a list of rules and punishments that they both agree

on such as "I will never agree to get together with someone I 'meet' online without first checking with my parents" for the kids, and for the parents, "I will get to know the services and Web sites my child uses. If I don't know how to use them, I'll get my child to show me how."

As for cyberbullying, he offered this advice to students:

"There are plenty of people you don't get along with, but be civil towards each other," he said. "Just walk away. You don't need to make a comment."

If your child does post a nasty comment about someone on Facebook, regrets it and comes to talk you about it, Gunderson said try to remain calm, call that kid and their parents and work it out. He also said parents shouldn't use the computer as a babysitter. "That's too much time and access to the computer when they are not being monitored," he said.

Principal Peter Lucia said that a lot of "conflict in the school starts on Facebook and from texting. We are all in this together. My message to them was that there was a lot of good information (from Gunderson) and that's what we are here for -- to help you make good decisions."

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