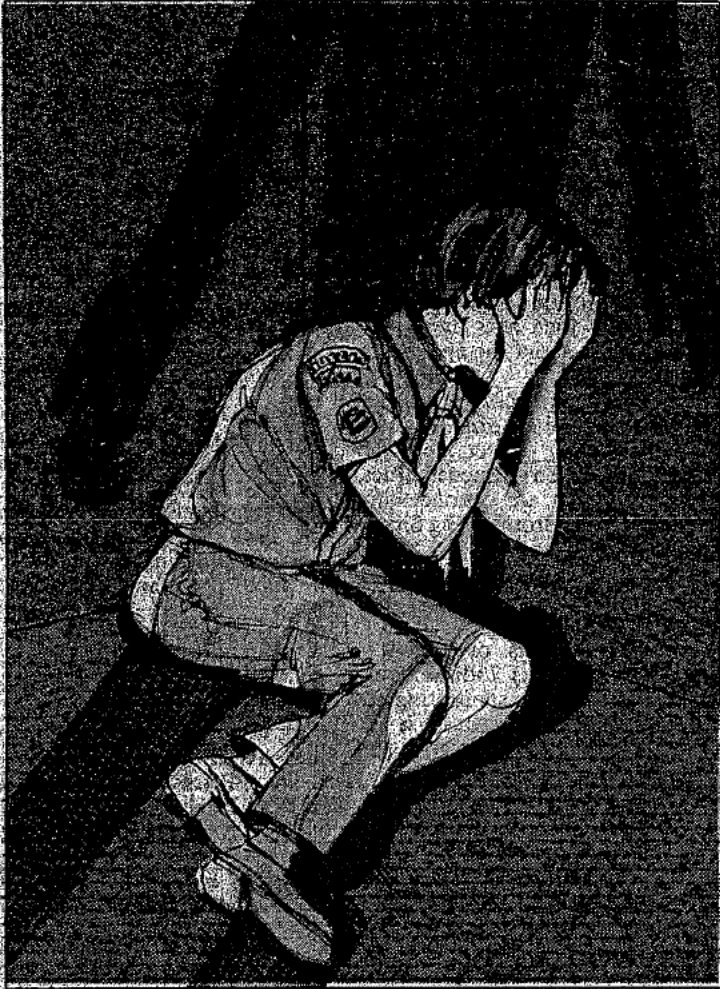


# Red tape snarls groups' efforts to clear ranks of child molesters



Staff illustration by Bob Borsky

By Andrea Zentz  
Milford Bureau Chief

He or she could be a Sunday School teacher, Scout leader, day-care supervisor, Little League manager or counselor.

A child molester.

Each year, reports abound of molesters infiltrating volunteer organizations, preying on defenseless boys and girls. The problem has forced parents to

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take a second look at the people to whom they always have entrusted their children's care. And, it has compelled the organizations to enforce stringent screening policies.

Representatives of volunteer organizations say reports of perverts targeting their children crop up each year, but while there is cause for alarm, the problem is not of crisis proportions. Organizations like Big Brothers-Big Sisters, Boy Scouts of America, and Girl Scouts of the United States of America each tackle the problem differently.

Big Brothers-Big Sisters of America, for example, is pushing legislation permitting national police checks on the background of its volunteers, said Donald Wolff, vice president of

Big Brothers-Big Sisters programs.

In a telephone interview from his St. Louis office, Wolff said he has gained the assistance of [redacted] whose story about the kidnapping and decapitation of his son [redacted] became the subject of a television documentary. [redacted] story provided an impetus behind an ongoing movement to find missing youngsters. His father represents the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Wolff said [redacted] has agreed to include the proposed background check in a legislative package protecting missing children. [redacted] is lobbying for the package in Congress, while Wolff prepares a model bill allowing background checks to be presented to each state legislature. He said he doubts Congress will pass the legislation.

"It costs money to have a central collection area," he said. "Nobody wants to take the time or trouble. They feel it should be left up to the states. That's the fractionalization of the problem."

Some states allow Big Brothers-Big Sisters agencies to run police checks, he said, but the investigation is illegal in other states. And, some states prohibit the use of the National Crime

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# Scout records fail to ferret out offender

By Andrea Zentz  
Milford Bureau Chief

MILFORD — The Boy Scouts of America has banished a leader who last year received one of its highest honors, after learning the man was convicted 18 years ago of molesting a Boy Scout.

Donald Fricke, 41, of Milford, was convicted in 1966 of fondling a 14-year-old boy when he was a Scoutmaster at Old Settler's Boy Scout Camp in Milford, according to Superior Court records. But the Boy Scout organization was unaware of his criminal record until two weeks ago, said Kenneth

Quinnipiac Council in Hamden.

Prowse said the organization keeps track of all members with convictions, but he was unaware of this incident because a 1982 flood wiped out the Scouting records. He later conceded, however, that Fricke had rejoined the organization in 1977, five years before the records were washed away. Current council files show no record of the 1966 incident, he said.

Prowse also said the council was unaware of the molestation because of a high turnover in leaders and no full-time staff at the camp, which has since been developed into residential housing

here as far as I can tell," he said.

He said someone wrote the national office in the 1960s about the Fricke case, but the organization never moved to oust Fricke because there was no court verification. When Fricke tried to renew his membership in 1977, representatives of the national headquarters asked area leaders whether there was any reason to deny membership. Prowse said the local officials told national organization they had no reason.

Although Prowse was unaware of the incident, a parent of a Boy Scout, who requested anonymity, said his son

about a month ago at a Scout meeting. He told another parent who reportedly said he had just learned about the conviction and notified Scout executives.

In a telephone interview, Fricke denied any knowledge of the convictions, calling them "rumors." But when confronted with details, Fricke said "There was a long time ago. There has been nothing since."

Fricke said he will meet with his attorney.

"I believe everyone is entitled to a second chance," he said. "Why after 20 years, why there a concern?"

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# Scouts: Honored leader banished

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Police and court records indicate the molestation occurred May 7, 1966. The victim awoke when Fricke unzipped his sleeping bag and began fondling him, the records said. They said the boy told Fricke to leave, but he did not report the incident until weeks later. His parents, noticing a disturbing behavioral change, finally convinced him to talk about the problem, the reports said.

Fricke was sentenced to concurrent one-year jail terms for indecent assault and risk of injury to a minor. But the sentences were suspended and he was placed on probation, with the requirement he receive psychiatric help for three years.

Risk of injury to a minor is defined in state statutes as wilfully or unlawfully causing or permitting any child under age 16 to be placed in a situation where his life, limb, health or morals are endangered or impaired.

Indecent assault, a charge that is no longer on the books, was vaguely defined as an overt act which does not need a description unless the accused requests the court to

the city nine years. He was a Boy Scout unit commissioner on the district level, in charge of ensuring that leaders take advantage of program and training opportunities. Fricke worked with the boys in the Order of the Arrow, a Scouting honor program, and recently received its highest tribute, a vigil honor.

Jane Platt, whose son belongs to the Order of the Arrow, said she was surprised to learn of the conviction.

"We talked to our son about this because we realize it happens in Boy Scouts from time to time," she said. "It's difficult to know what to do. My only concern is whether he is likely to cause any problems."

Another parent, Shirley Ellis, said Fricke deserves a second chance.

"I think he has made a great deal of good influence on my son," she said. "He has helped out my son a lot."

Roland Walter, a Milford Scoutmaster, said Fricke's conviction was upsetting, but not surprising.

"It was a problem in the 3-

ly banish him from Boy Scouts.

Anyone convicted of charges involving sexual assault or molestation is not allowed back into Scouting, but Prowse said he wanted to give the case further study.

"Can you hold something against someone for that long time ago?" he asked. "It depends what's happened since. If he has received psychiatric treatment, then we have to take a hard look at that."

But Prowse said he did not look into the possible success of Fricke's psychiatric care. Instead, the council asked for Fricke's resignation, saying he failed to meet the criteria of a role model for the Boy Scouts.

Rae Chavez, a spokesman for the National Boy Scouts of America in Irving, Texas, said the national organization would not intervene.

"If this occurred 18 years ago, and he was a model leader since then, it's hard to say. We're not God. We're not a jury," he said. "If there is a danger here, then they (members of the local council) are the right to remove him."

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## Molest: Groups seek to identify problems

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