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Washington County, Va., Allen Francies Labbe charged with possessing child pornography Washington County Virginia Sheriff's Office

By MICHAEL OWENS<<http://www2.tricities.com/staff/44976/>> Washington County Virginia Sheriff's Office

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WASHINGTON COUNTY, Va.

A high-tech game of digital hide and seek led police to charge a local man with 100 counts of possessing child pornography. The Washington County Sheriff's Office, after being tipped off that illegal photos were sent to an Internet protocol address in Washington County, said a search warrant turned up a computer containing dozens of photos depicting children 2 years old and up.

On Wednesday, Allen Francies Labbe, 53, who lives on Wyndale Road, was arrested and charged. He is being held without bond in the Southwest Virginia Regional Jail in Abingdon. If convicted, he would face up to five years in prison on the first charge, and up to 10 years on each subsequent charge.

Sheriff Fred Newman said his investigators must now determine if any of the children in the pictures are local, and whether the photos were shared with anyone else on the web.

"It's going to be a labor-intensive investigation from the standpoint of other agencies," Newman said.

The search for the owner of that IP address started weeks ago, when investigators with a statewide task force noticed a local Internet address receiving snippets of digital signatures already connected to illegal porn, county Detective Billy Nichols said.

Skimming through the cyber universe are millions of strings of data, all connected to the photographs, music, movies and other information called up with each click of a mouse. And each string has a unique identification marker tagging along for the ride to every computer requesting those particular songs and pictures. Some images of child porn have circulated the World Wide Web for so long that police

with specialized monitoring software can spot it just by looking for the well-known ID markers as they flit through the network, Nichols said.

In this case, the markers were recognized by the Bedford-based Southern Virginia Internet Crimes Against Children, which includes the Washington County Sheriff's Department as a member.

"When they saw where he lived, they contacted me ... and sent a search warrant," Nichols said.

Deputies searched the home at 16075 Wyndale Road three weeks ago, Newman said, and seized six computers, a cell phone and 1,627 movies.

After scouring all of the hard drives, deputies said, they found images of child porn downloaded and saved on a single computer. They also found illegal images in the computer's unallocated memory space, where snapshots of web pages are automatically dumped until overwritten by new data.

"It's a time consuming investigation," Newman said. "It's not something where you just go in and look" at someone's computer.

Detective Billy Nichols
Washington County Sheriff's Office
Office: (276)676-6033
Fax: (276)676-6248