



St. Anthony of Padua students in Parma show they are tops with online safety

By Bob Sandrick, Sun News

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PARMA A group of 176 pupils at St. Anthony of Padua have proven they can safely navigate the Internet — and do it better than anyone in the country.

In March, the children took first place in the FBI-Safe Online Surfing Internet Challenge, a monthly competition organized by the FBI and Nova Southeastern University in Florida.

In the program, children in grades five through eight are trained to recognize and avoid Internet predators.

About 2,000 pupils in 50 schools across the United States participated in March alone.

On Friday, the St. Anthony kids were honored for their March victory. FBI agents from Cleveland and Washington, D.C. went to the school and handed out awards.

It's not the first time St. Anthony pupils have taken first place in the Internet Challenge. They also won in March 2008.

But **Jennifer Petras**, the pupils' Internet Challenge teacher at St. Anthony, said winning isn't as important as playing the game.

"I really believe this program has opened their eyes to what can happen online," Petras said.

Petras said she would like to see every school in the United States take the Internet Challenge.

"The competition would be harder but it's something that would ease parents' minds," Petras said.

Internet Challenge was created in 2005 after the FBI in Miami — its Crime Against Children Unit — approached NSU.

The FBI wanted to stop Internet predators and thought Daryl Hulce, president of NSU's Common Knowledge Scholarship Foundation, could help.

Hulce had created a scholarship program for students with street smarts. To win, they must pass online quizzes containing common-knowledge questions.

The FBI knew about Hulce's scholarship program and asked him to design a similar online quiz that would teach middle-school children Internet safety.



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Rachel Hallman, a pupil at St. Anthony of Padua, received an Internet Challenge award on Friday. Jack Marschall, Parma's director of communications, handed out the awards on behalf of the FBI.

"They felt that's the age you can have the most impact and help children understand the dangers of the Internet," said Joanne Santivaschi, CKSF program coordinator.



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CJ Yonek was one of five St. Anthony of Padua pupils to receive Internet Challenge awards.

Hulce, with FBI input, started a pilot Internet Challenge program in 2005 for schools in southern Florida.

Since then, Internet Challenge has expanded to about 40 states. Between 30-60 schools participate every month.

By taking part, children learn to spot red flags when they're chatting or playing games online.

First, pupils take a pretest to determine what they know about Internet safety.

Then they sit down for an online scavenger hunt that escorts them to more than 20 pre-screened websites.

Along the way, children learn predator tactics like "grooming." That's when predators try to make friends with children. Predators might, for example, offer to make targets professional models.

Children can avoid such tactics by choosing non-revealing user names. A name like "Jenny96" isn't good because it tells predators the name and possible birth year of a child.

Internet Challenge teaches children how to block suspicious people they meet online and tells them to report anyone suspicious to their parents.

Santivaschi said the FBI is so pleased with the program that it has adopted it as a national initiative.

Hulce has been surprised by the program's success.

"It's incredibly rewarding," Hulce said. "It's kind of humbling for one person to make such an impact."

The program is effective because children love computers and the Internet.

"I often tell people we use the same technology that caused the problem to help solve the problem," Hulce said.

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