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RIVERSIDE COUNTY MAN SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON FOR TRAVELING TO SEXUALLY ABUSE A 7-YEAR-OLD BOY

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – A former resident of Mountain Center who was convicted last summer of possessing child pornography and sexually abusing a child was sentenced this morning to 20 years in federal prison.

James Sanders, 63, was sentenced by United States District Judge Virginia A. Phillips.

Last June, following a two-week trial, Sanders was found guilty of conspiring to possess child pornography, possession of child pornography, traveling from California to New Mexico in December 2000 for the purpose of engaging in a sexual act with a boy under 12, and aggravated sexual abuse of that same boy. The victim, who was then 7, is the son of Sanders' longtime friends.

Sanders was prosecuted as a result of "Operation Blue Orchid," an investigation conducted by United States customs officials into a Russian organization that produced and sold child pornography videos depicting the graphic sexual abuse of young boys. One of the original Blue Orchid defendants – a United States citizen who had purchased numerous Blue Orchid child pornography videos – had numerous internet "instant message" communications with Sanders stored on his computer, which led authorities to Sanders and his computer, on which Sanders had stored child pornography. In his "instant message" communications, Sanders described, among other things, his sexual abuse of the 7-year-old boy. At the time, Sanders was the property manager of a girls' camp.

"The victimization of children for sexual purposes is one of the most heinous crimes imaginable," said United States Attorney Thomas P. O'Brien. "This is why prosecuting child predators is one of the top priorities of the Justice Department."

Sanders previously pleaded no contest to child molestation charges in New Mexico and was sentenced to three years in state prison. He was charged with possession of child pornography in a federal indictment in June 2004 while he was in prison in New Mexico. In June 2006, a federal grand jury returned a superseding indictment that charged Sanders with interstate travel to have sex with a minor and aggravated sexual abuse of a minor.

"This sentence sends a strong message to child sex predators that there will be high price to pay for their actions," said Jennifer Silliman, deputy special agent in charge for the ICE office of investigations in Los Angeles. "We owe it to the young victims to pursue these cases aggressively, since many of the children will bear the emotional scars of this trauma for rest of their lives."

This case is the result of an international investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (formerly the United States Customs Service), which received the assistance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Riverside County Sheriff's Department and New Mexico law enforcement officials.

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