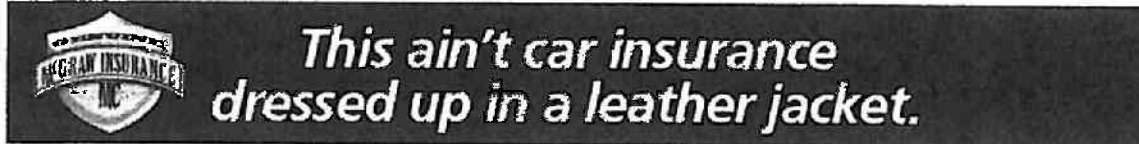


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Dec 17, 2006 2:51 pm US/Central

Sex Offender Foiled By Church Volunteer

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(STNG) ROMEOVILLE A church volunteer foiled a sex offender's bid to slip into a religious education program for children, officials said Wednesday.

The woman confronted the sex offender as he tried to pass himself off as a volunteer for the children's program at Community Christian Church Sunday. She then notified a church pastor, and the offender never got a chance to be alone with any children.

Church officials contacted police, the matter was investigated and an arrest warrant was secured. The offender -- 20-year-old Nicholas Diddens of 38 Arborwood Court -- was taken into custody Tuesday.

Diddens posed as a volunteer and attempted to make his way into the church Sunday morning but was stopped in the lobby, said Jim Semradek, a pastor with the church.

Semradek said he was called in to straighten things out, and after a lengthy argument with Diddens, the interloper went on his way.

Church officials later learned Diddens was a sex offender.

The fateful trip to the church was Diddens' second visit to the place of worship, Semradek said.

He had dropped by some weeks before to fill out paperwork so he could work with children, Semradek said.

But Diddens failed to sign the paperwork and the church could not perform a background check, Semradek said.

When Diddens made his second appearance at the church and was confronted about his unauthorized presence, he became "belligerent" and insisted he did indeed sign the paperwork, Semradek said.

"It was kind of a silly claim," he said.

Diddens only made it into the "teacher-lobby-gathering area" of the building, Semradek said, and was never alone with any children.

"He was in a very public area with a lot of teachers," he said.

And even if he had made it through the lobby, Diddens still had quite a way to go before he found himself alone with children, Semradek said.

"He was not even through the first layer of security," he said.

Diddens was put on the state's sex offender registry after pleading guilty to a charge of sexual exploitation of a child in May 2004.

Diddens was released from jail Wednesday after posting \$6,000 bond.

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Twenty-year-old Nicholas Diddens attempt to volunteer for a religious education program for children was foiled by a church volunteer.

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