

A 62-year-old Vernonia-area man is in custody tonight in the Columbia County Jail, charged with 29 counts of sexual crimes involving children. Columbia County Sheriff's Deputies took the man into custody without incident today while serving a search warrant and arrest warrant at his residence.

Deputies and federal agents have been conducting a 10-month-long investigation that began last June after the Sheriff's Office was alerted to reported sexual misconduct involving the suspect, Richard Scott Courtney and three children under the ages of 12. Interviews with the children with the help of the Amani Center in St. Helens and additional investigation with the help of federal authorities led to today's search warrant and arrest. The investigation into the crimes remains ongoing and more charges are expected.

"This case is the result of collaboration between our office and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents who assisted with the computer forensics investigation," said Sheriff Jeff Dickerson. "The length of the investigation is due to the nature of these kinds of investigations, particularly when much of the evidence is contained in digital computer files. We took efforts to ensure that the victims were removed from the suspect's home back in June, and we didn't begin to get a fuller picture of the extent of the abuse until computer forensic investigation revealed it."

The victims are 2 members of the suspect's extended family and a neighbor child who had been playing with the children. Much of the evidence was found stored on a computer voluntarily surrendered by the suspect to Sheriff's deputies in June. A search warrant was served on that computer in October, and submitted to ICE child exploitation specialists for review. There is some indication that federal crimes have also been committed in this case.

Mr. Courtney was lodged in the Columbia County Jail on 26 counts of Sex Abuse First Degree and three counts of Using a Child in Display of Sexually Explicit Conduct. Bail has been set at \$1,555,000.