

**Watchwords by Officer Tom Hanshaw**  
**August 20, 2010**

Every once in awhile, someone at the Police Station gives me a suggestion for a “Watchwords” article. A couple weeks ago, Attorney Kerri Reed, the police prosecutor for the department, suggested I mention something about “facebook.” She noticed a trend with some of her friends, who were writing information on their “walls” about vacation plans. She thought it was dangerous, to advertise the fact their homes were going to be vacant. Although “facebook” has several security features, many people don’t utilize them. The current phenomenon is certainly entertaining and a great way to stay in touch with friends and family members but you should follow a few safety tips too. No one should be afraid of the evolution of technology, otherwise we’d still be driving horse-drawn carriages and listening to vinyl records.

There are a number of threats facing computer users today and it’s very difficult to keep track of them all. In fact as technology evolves to benefit mankind, criminals are busy finding new ways to benefit themselves. As a start, be sure you have a good anti-virus program installed on your computer and keep it updated. Be sure you adjust the personal security levels, which offer the best protection. It’s also a good idea to keep track of the people you add as “friends,” after all it’s not meant to be a popularity site. Of course, never allow anyone access to your username or password. Some of the scams being found on Internet sites are actually twists of ones that have been around for years.

“Facebook” has a web page featuring safety tips for teens, parents and even law enforcement agencies, which can provide important tips. A quick search can also provide information about the various scams currently being used, including some you may recognize. Be wary of strange links, even if sent by a friend. Sometimes a hacker can compromise an account to obtain personal information or launch a virus into your computer. You may be asked to click on a link to view a funny video, complete a survey or take advantage of a free offer, accessing such a link could mean trouble. “Facebook” and other social hosts are working hard to reduce these scams but the criminals can be relentless so you’ve got to be alert.

In just the last couple weeks, since Kerri mentioned the idea of this column, I’ve noticed several incidents on the site. The first was an offer for a free I-Pad, which would be intriguing to anyone. The correspondence came through under the guise of a friend’s account and mentioned he had received his in the mail that day. I thought this was odd, as I had spoken to him a few days earlier about the trip he was taking to Europe. Therefore, I guessed he hadn’t actually gotten his mail that day and did not click on the link. Another offer involved a weight loss product with a claim of guaranteed success. Finally, there was the “hilarious video,” which could not be missed. Hackers will use these types of gimmicks to prompt you to “update” your flash player. If you do, you run the risk of loading a “worm” or virus into your computer. Sometimes it may be difficult to recognize a computer problem but taking that extra moment to be cautious may save you a lot of aggravation.

The next initiative in the Click It or Ticket Mobilization begins on August 20<sup>th</sup> and continues through Labor Day; “Drunk Driving, Over the Limit, Under Arrest.” This effort of law enforcement agencies and the media is designed to reduce the number of crashes; injuries and deaths attributed to impaired driving. The Labor Day weekend, sadly, marks the unofficial end of the summer season and traditionally is amongst the most dangerous times on our roadways. Impaired driving, either because of alcohol, drugs or medication, continues to be a serious problem. Despite public awareness efforts, stricter laws and added enforcement, too many people still drive motor vehicles when they should not. Driving while impaired can result in criminal charges, civil liability and a senseless tragedy. If you’ve had too much to drink, don’t take the chance and when someone you know has; don’t be afraid to intervene. Officers will be assigned to extra patrols over the next two weeks throughout the area in an effort to make our roadways safer for everyone.

Finally, there will be a Relay For Life Team Captain meeting on Monday August 23<sup>rd</sup>, at 7:00 PM at the Conference Room in the Amesbury Health Center, 24 Morrill Place. Team Captains who have already registered will be able to pick up important Relay materials and t-shirts for their team members. If your team has not yet registered, there is still time to help fight cancer. There will also be a short presentation on handling food safely at the event. The 8<sup>th</sup> annual Relay For Life of Amesbury is being held at Landry Stadium on September 11<sup>th</sup>, starting at 2:00 PM. The money raised provides services to cancer patients, promotes public awareness and funds important research. You can help bring the American Cancer Society closer to a cure, visit [www.relayforlife.org/amesburyma](http://www.relayforlife.org/amesburyma) today to donate or learn more.