



**Opinion**  
GET Juiced  
with Governor  
Perry



Save the  
Kite Runner  
Boys



Hacker  
Free?

# Dateline: Downtown

Feb. 26 - March 18, 2007 NEWSPAPER FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN Spring Volume 38 Issue 3

S T U D E N T - R U N S I N C E V O L U M E O N E

## Campus News



### 18<sup>th</sup> National African American Read-In Comes to UHD

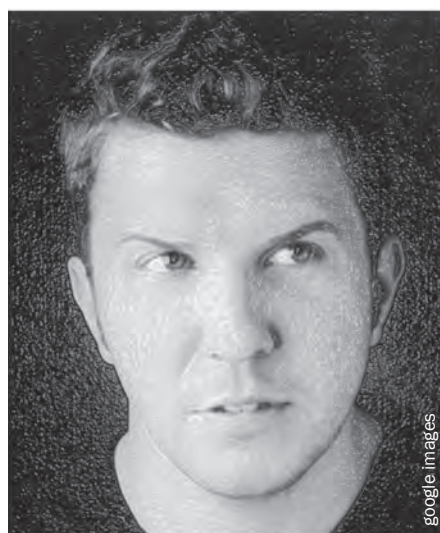
By Paula L. Lee  
Dateline: Downtown

University of Houston Downtown embraced the opportunity to host the 18<sup>th</sup> National African American Read-In on Monday February 5, 2007. The purpose of the read-in was to share in the appreciation of the literary works of African Americans and to join over a million people around the world, on a specified

date, as a way to kick off Black History Month. According to information provided by the NCTE Coordinator, Dr. Sandra Gibbs, the first read-in was held in 1990 and has since spread to 49 states, the West Indies, and several countries in Africa. Organizations participating in the read-in included schools, churches, libraries and bookstores largely due to their recognition of the importance of literacy.

The event was sponsored by  
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## Arts and Entertainment



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**Nick Suardson**  
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Wil Chinchilla  
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## Sports

### Communication student's sports urge lands position with Arena League Football

By Megan Murray-McDonald  
Dateline: Downtown

It's that time of year, the Superbowl is over and your team (unless it's the Colts)

did not win. If you are a Texans' fan, your team DEFINITELY did not win. If you are a Cowboy's fan your team did not win in the most dramatic, yet

hilarious way possible. So, what is a football fan to do in the long, cold months before the pigskin is tossed about again?

**SEE SPORTS ON PAGE 4**



### AIDS Walk begins registration UHD students encouraged to form teams

By Andre Wojcik  
Assistant Editor

Attention UHD students. There is something special going on in the city of Houston. An organization of both professionals and volunteers are working together to help people affected with HIV and AIDS. They want you to get involved, and in doing

so, get a little exercise while raising money intended to help fellow Houstonians who suffer from HIV and AIDS.

Yes, it is time for AIDS Walk 2007. Registration is going on now through March 2<sup>nd</sup>, the walk taking place on Sunday March 11<sup>th</sup>. You may have seen the posters and pamphlets around town, but many of you might be

wondering what exactly AIDS Walk is and how to get involved.

AIDS Walk, as the name suggests, is a 5 kilometer non-competitive walk, starting at Sam Houston Park downtown (1000 Bagby Street), and follows a route up and down Allen Parkway. It occurs on Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, with check-in starting at 8:00

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S T U D E N T - R U N S I N C E V O L U M E O N E

## Wake Up UHD Voters Perry's on the Loose

By Barbara Carlson  
Dateline: Downtown

Okay y'all, this is our wake-up call. We can sit on our laurels or speak up now. As a far right-wing conservative, I am appalled by our governor's actions. Clearly, our governor is laying the groundwork for becoming the next vice presidential hopeful in 2008. A word of caution to all of us: Look at how our governor has used his power to get exactly what he wanted without any other voice. Sound repetitive here? We have *another* imperial leader on our hands.

So, let's take a moment

and analyze why so many conservatives, like me, are outraged by such a mandate that our governor has the authority to exercise. Few argue, in support of our governor, that such an aggressive Executive Order is important for the safety of our future women. Quite simply, the bill would not pass into legislation. And Perry knew it.

The plan would give women some security as a victim of the deadliest and fastest growing cancer – cervical cancer. And even more importantly, once a female has a hysterectomy, her ability of a successful recovery from HPV that develops into cervical cancer is minimal. So, one may ask, what's the problem here?

I am tired – damn tired – of

paying for another state program for the children enrolled in CHIP or on Medicaid, which will cost them nothing. Once again, the single-parent families or two-parent families who are at or near the poverty line will bear another financial burden. And remember, the millions of immigrants who are screaming now also qualify under our Medicaid program. Yes, they benefit above you and I.

Even more alarming, aside from the socioeconomic reverse discrimination, is the outrage our doctors have expressed. It is critical that we listen very closely to our experts who say that we do *not* have enough data on this drug to mandate it at this point. "So I ask you, Governor Perry, will you personally pick up the pieces for all the girls who are vaccinated with this mandated drug if your guess is wrong?"

"No, of course I won't, Miss UHD college student! My taxpayers will," he would scream

back and smile, if he had the courage to answer.

And worst of all, UHD students, look at relevant historical data here. Remember all of the atrocities with the Rotavirus vaccine eight years ago? It caused such serious intussusceptions (bowel obstructions) in babies that it was eventually withdrawn from the market. In the meantime, Rotavirus left serious, life-threatening effects on these babies. The new Rotavirus vaccine on the market uses the same dosage and administration, and such dangers are noted on the label. Still, cases are again surfacing. And I'll give all of you only one guess as to who produced this potent drug. Yes, you're right – Merck!!!

So, my fellow students ignore the fact that Mike Toomey (Merck's chief lobbyist in Texas) and Perry are friends and they have *not* even spoken on this issue. Students, that's politics!

Political Science majors know that bills are pushed through Congress every day in our country by people who *know* the decision makers. That goes with the territory. But our experts are screaming "NO!" And we see health issues with a previous drug experiment that has not been perfected, yet remains on the market carrying a *warning* to all of us to use at our own risk. It is our duty as parents to speak up for our children's sake. I urge every student at UHD to write our congressman or woman, scream loud and clear because our little sixth graders do not have the power to be heard. We cannot afford Merck, Toomey – and yes, Perry – playing with our little girls' lives. And we cannot let our governor exercise excessive power for a personal gain. He's lost touch with us and his focus is no longer in Texas but elsewhere – the East Coast. ■

### Letter to the Editor

#### The "gay" issue?

Dear Managing Editor:

I have been a student at UHD for several years and I have always enjoyed reading the Dateline. I am just curious to know when the publication became so gay? Out of all the issues and articles I've read over the past couple of years, I don't believe I've ever seen an issue so rife with homosexual undertones as was the last (Issue 2). Is this a direction you have personally engineered for the paper, or is it a bi-product of the collective staff in your office? Is there an agenda? I am open to alternative lifestyles, but I would like to see a little less pink when I am reading the objective press. Can you actually work for the Dateline if you are straight, or is there

a restriction? Thank you and I look forward to your response.

Anonymous

Dear Anonymus,

Thank you for your thoughtful examination and response to the overall layout of Issue 2. I would like you to know that pink is not my color (Snap!). Dateline is a place where all walks of life coexist to produce a by-monthly publication. The UHD community is comprised of gay, lesbian, straight, transsexuals, etc... and each one of them is entitled to express themselves freely, encouraged to submit articles and be active participants in the publication process, including yourself.

Cheers,  
Juan Ortiz  
Layout Editor

### READ IN

continued from page 1

the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English and co-sponsored by UHD's Black Student Alliance and the Cultural Enrichment Center. Dr. Vida Robertson, Professor of English, was invited to be the faculty host of the event because of his experience, knowledge and dedication to promoting literacy. The readings were held from 1:00 until 5:00 in A-300, Buffalo Bayou Room. There were professors as well as students participating in the reading. Some of the poems read were by well noted authors like: Nikki Giovanni, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and Margaret Walker. The room would fall silent as the next name would be called to read. Three students representing UHD's NAACP organization read Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise", and the applause that followed was indicative of the well receptive audience.

Although this was a reading of works created by African Americans, the cultural diversity in the room was across the board; there were a wide range of classifications there as well, from freshmen to seniors to PHD Professors; all uniting for a common goal, to read or listen to these wonderful literary works of African American authors. Some of the readers expressed why they selected the piece they chose to read; either it inspired them or touched them in some way. One reader expressed his in-depth knowledge of the pieces he read by giving insight into the times the poems were written and by giving a sense of power that went into the writings; the meaning behind the poems. Some just announced who wrote the poem and read. There were some who even had the courage to read poems that some might consider being controversial; even in today's society. This program was designed to highlight the literary works of the past and present, and was to this reporter a success. ■

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## ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT

## Student Government Association

By Garrett Gibson  
Vice President of SGA

German dramatist, novelist, poet, and playwright, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, once said that, "Thinking is easy, acting is difficult, and to put one's thoughts into action is the most difficult thing in the world."

The Student Government Association (SGA) at the

University of Houston-Downtown is an organization that acts on the ideas and proposals submitted by students and administration. Composed entirely of students, SGA is a non-partisan organization that serves the entire student body. Our goal is to bring about positive changes and improvements on behalf of the students. It is at SGA where ideas, proposals, and concepts are discussed, debated, revised and eventually acted upon.

To accomplish our goals, we interact directly with

administration and faculty to improve the student experience at UHD. At the beginning of each semester, SGA meets with the leaders of the UHD administration to discuss changes for the future. We advocate on behalf of student grievances and discuss proposed improvements with the UHD administration.

Representing you for the spring 2007 semester, on the SGA Executive Council are the following individuals: Christopher Sharpe—SGA President, Garrett Gibson—SGA Vice-President, Daniel

Almanza—SGA Treasurer, and London Flores—SGA Executive Secretary.

Additionally, SGA also assists in coordinating certain campus events. For example, SGA was pivotal in making the UHD Career Expo the success that it was. Occasionally, SGA also works with external organizations to improve student life. The UPASS serves as an excellent example as the fruit of the labor of SGA. Because of the persistent work of members of SGA, the Metro UPASS was extended until August 31, 2007. Currently, SGA is working with the City of Houston to improve the sidewalk along North Main Street, which connects the Daly Street Parking Lot to UHD. Whether current or completed,

these projects illustrate the ongoing process at SGA where thoughts and ideas are put into action.

Getting involved in UHD SGA is easy! If you are interested in having a voice in SGA, then don't hesitate to contact us. Feel free to come by our office, which is located at S244. You can also contact SGA by phone at 713-221-8511 or by email at sga@uhd.edu.

Even after two centuries, Goethe's words still ring true today. I encourage you to join the Student Government Association at the University of Houston-Downtown where every day, "the most difficult thing in the world" is accomplished—putting one's thoughts into action! ■



By Rebecca Gunnels  
Dateline: Downtown

Ahmad Mahmidzada may just regret taking home the twelve grand he earned from DreamWorks (now Paramount). Six months ago, he was a simple schoolboy in Kabul, Afghanistan, a privileged status in a country in which 64% of the people can neither read nor write. Out of 2000 students, Paramount picked Ahmad and two of his classmates, Zekeria and Ali, to star in their next box-office hopeful, *The Kite Runner*, based on the bestselling novel by Khaled Hosseini.

The young actors and their families were flown to China to film for three months, where they experienced the novelty of safety and freedom. "We want to study in the United States. It's a modern country and more safe than here," said Zekeria, who played the young version of the lead role.

After filming ended a

## Afghan Boys Exploited by Paramount Pictures

month ago, they were packed up and sent back to Kabul. That is when the reality set in. What contract had they signed? They arrived home to unemployment, and an air of apprehension about the proposed release of the film. Right now, they have a period of months, as the film is scheduled for release in November. The boys are agitated, wondering how their friends and fellow Afghans will respond to a controversial rape scene in the film.

"The rape scene upset me because my friends will watch it and I won't be able to go outside any more. They will think I was raped," said 11 year old Ahmad.

*The Kite Runner* is about the unlikely friendship between two young boys Amir and the family servant Hassan. Amir is unable to claim friendship with or protect Hassan, who is attacked and raped in an alley by town bullies. Amir, having witnessed the attack but unable to act, carries the guilt of his cowardice for 30 years, where the story begins.

Amir is Afghan and Hassan is Hazara. As illuminated in the novel, the Hazara have been a persecuted ethnic group in Afghanistan. The sensitivities of this group run deep, exacerbated by the

grisly persecution they suffered under the Taliban until 2001.

"People will come and arrest us and put us in jail. They will think we've made the Hazara look bad," said Ahmad's father.

To describe the risk of this dispute in Afghanistan,

another controversial film, *Kabul Express*, was released last year and subsequently banned. The lead Afghan actor fled the country because the Hazara in positions of power were contemplating punitive measures.

"Peace and security

are very fragile," reports a university student in Kabul. "We have to wait until rule of law comes to our country. We have the same gunmen in the government who caused all the problems." She suggests that even their president, Hamed

**SEE AFGHAN ON PAGE 6**

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# WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE, LADIES

## Comedy

# One Night Stand...up:

## INTERVIEW with Nick Swardson

By Wil Chinchilla  
Dateline: Downtown

Nick Swardson has been a comedian since he was 19. On February 17, he performed for a full house at the Houston Improv. Walking into a standing ovation and giving all the “fist pounds” he could give, he began the greatest comedy Houston could hope for. During the act, Swardson promised the audience that there will be a sequel for *Grandma’s Boy*. Recently Dateline sat down for a chance to interview the legendary Nicholas Swardson.

**DL:** Did you go to college?

**Nick:** I didn’t go to college. I started standup straight out of High School when I was nineteen.

**DL:** Is there a reason why you tour so many colleges?

**Nick:** College is my favorite, ‘cuz they’re fun. Those are kinda my core fans; they’re the ones that watch Comedy Central. It’s a lot of fun. It’s one show. In a club I have to do like six shows in a week, but college

is just one night, and I always go out afterwards with crowd and party. It’s crazy.

**DL:** Do you feel comedians have a role in shaping how Americans feel about national and international events?

**Nick:** That’s an interesting question, because it’s a fine line. I think that some people just wanna be funny and don’t get political because you’re just supposed to be funny. But Janeane Garofalo is a good friend of mine, and she got really political, to the point where she almost changed her career, and going out against Bush and stuff like that. She gets so much flack for it and I think if you can walk the line of being political and still being funny like the way David Cross is really political—but he can also like tell funny drunk stories and mix it up. But, it’s a really fine line though. I’ve touched on it in the past but normally I’m like people come to a comedy club, they want to laugh. I feel like I don’t want to push an agenda on them.

**DL:** A video has resurfaced on YouTube of your “Barq (Root Beer Soda) has Bite” days...

**Nick:** I know, that’s the



Nick Swardson improvising Terry the gay prostitute on *Reno 911: Miami*.

crazy thing about the internet!

**DL:** Was that your first major media job?

**Nick:** Yes, that was the first big thing I ever did. And I did it for years; I think I did ten twelve commercials for them. Yeah that was a trip to see those come back. I was like, Oh my gosh! It’s so weird, but those commercials I owe everything to because I got them right when I started standup. I was totally broke and they afforded me to be able to go out on the road and struggle and pay for hotels and stuff. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to go out there so, I owe Barq’s Root Beer my whole stand-up comedy career.

**DL:** In the role of Terry, can you define what it is like portraying a gay roller-skating male prostitute on *Reno 911!*?

**Nick:** The funny thing about it is that it’s such a crazy character. I love it; I have a blast, because you can say the craziest stuff. To me I really don’t dwell on the gay thing with Terry, for me it’s more just, him trying to get out of situations and lying. Like being so naïve I think that the fun part about Terry. It’s like Terry what where you doing? “What, Im just allergic to roofs” he just says the craziest stuff so it’s just fun lying.

**DL:** *Grandma’s Boy* has mainly been considered by critics as a “cult-classic for stoners and video game fanboys.” What is your view on *Grandma’s Boy*?

**Nick:** I would disagree.

I love *Grandma’s Boy*. I think it’s definitely a cult-classic but the critics were horrible to us. Most of the critics said that it was the biggest piece of shit ever made. I got into a big fight with the critics and emailed guys back and told them to fuck off. I mean we got into a whole big thing, but you know it is what it is. We made it, the fans love it, and critics are such assholes. The DVD is blowing up and people really respond to it and that’s all I really care about.

**DL:** Do you feel you’re ‘in the loop’ of success with comics such as Jim Gaffigan and David Cross?

**Nick:** As far as stand up goes, I’ve known these guys for years, so it’s not like I feel like finally I know all these guys. I’ve known these guys literally for years. I started with all these guys. I know Jim Gaffigan. I started with Dane Cook. For me it’s almost like a high school where I’ve grown up with people and now that you see them at different levels of success, it’s like cool and exciting. I’m happy for Dane and Gaffigan and those guys. I mean, acting wise I’m getting kind more into branching out, meeting people like Will Farrell and knowing guys like that, so it’s cool being in another circle that way. But stand up, I’ve known these retards my whole life.

**DL:** Is there anyone you would like to work with in the future that you haven’t already?

**Nick:** ...Umm... I don’t know, I mean I’ve worked with Adam Sandler, David Spade, all those guys. Stiller. I would like to do something with [Ben] Stiller. Stiller and I might do something this year. But I would like to work with Ben; I think Ben’s really funny. In the Will Farrell movie, I didn’t have any scenes with Will so I would actually like to do something with Will.

**DL:** If you can bring one person from history back to life, who would it be and why?

**Nick:** Anna Nicole Smith... just ‘cuz.

You can pick up Nick Swardson’s work anywhere. *Grandma’s Boy* is a must-have DVD for every college student. Go see Nick’s upcoming roles in *Blades of Glory*, *Chuck and Larry*, and *Reno 911!: Miami*. Nick Swardson is a comic for our generation and his distinctive style is adored by many. To the read and listen (mp3) to the complete interview subscribe to my blog on Myspace at <http://blog.myspace.com/chinchilla20>

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Wil hangs out with Nick Swardson after interview.

## FOOTBALL

# Arena Football...what's an Arena Football?

By Megan Murray-McDonald  
Dateline: Downtown

One of UHD's own, Matthew Beeler, is an Offensive/Defensive Lineman for the Copperheads. Beeler, a 24 year old Communications major from Katy, has been playing football since the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Beeler had given up his football dreams after three knee surgeries, "I had retired and was going to focus on graduating, but then I had an opportunity to tryout last year, and it wasn't something I couldn't pass up because I still had the urge to play", he told UHD Dateline. Beeler is even more enthusiastic about this upcoming season, "with the talent and coaching we'll have this year, I only expect great things to happen. It's going to be exciting".

Beeler's excitement comes from the growing popularity of the Arena League Football franchise. Created in 1987 by a former NFL executive, the Arena Football League (AFL) has expanded to 19 teams and even hosts a minor league, which includes the Texas Copperheads. Once relegated to odd cable networks, teams like the Philadelphia Soul and the New Orleans VooDoo will be televised on ESPN's family of T.V. stations. Fox Sports Net also has a deal for local affiliates to show local games.

When you watch an AFL you will notice there are some differences in the way the game is played. Beeler explains, "There are some big differences between the AFL and NFL. The AFL is indoors on a 50 yard field, about half the size of the NFL. There are also walls around the field. The team plays 8 on 8, and it is really

built for excitement and scoring. There is no punting, you either have to go for it on fourth down or kick a field goal. The goalposts are half as wide with nets on both sides". The AFL also starts its season in April, and the regular season runs through July.

The Copperheads play at the Berry Center, located in West Houston at 8877 Cyprus Barker Road. Ticket prices start at 10 dollars, so it is an affordable way to get your football fix. For those of you with football dreams of your own, there are open team tryouts for the team and for the dance squad, the Texas Charmers, in January.

So get on out and support your local team and fellow UHD Student! Let's go and watch the Copperheads Strike!

For more information visit the Copperheads website at <http://www.texas-copperheads.com/> ■



photo courtesy of Copperheads

Experience a winning season with AFL team, The Texas Copperheads.

## WALK

continued from page 1

am, an opening ceremony at 9:00 am, and the walk beginning at 10:00 am. There is a suggested donation of \$25 from each participant, although more is surely appreciated. In fact, each participant can have friends and families pledge a donation; there are even programs in which a participant's employers may match the amount donated by the participant. Many participants band together and form 'teams' that walk together, expressing group solidarity for this important cause.

Hurry, because registration ends March 2<sup>nd</sup>. If you are interested, you may sign up on the web site [www.aidswalk.org](http://www.aidswalk.org). The telephone number for any more information for the event is (713) 403-WALK (9255).

The Grand Marshals for this year's AIDS Walk are Houston's own J Xavier and Hydeia Broadbent. J Xavier, only fourteen years old, is an up-and-coming hip-hop artist who is really making a name for himself; he has even recorded with funk legend George Clinton. Hydeia Broadbent is vocal AIDS

activist. She was born with HIV and abandoned at a Las Vegas hospital, where doctors predicted she would not make it past age five. Now 21, she is a living testament to what hope together with modern medicine can achieve.

Organizing the event is a local group, AIDS Foundation Houston, Inc. (AFH) in partnership with Chevron. This year's goal is to have 15,000 walkers and a million dollars in donations. This may seem like a lot, but, considering that there were over 12 thousands walkers last year who helped raise \$700,000, it is a feasible number.

Certainly, money is needed in the fight against AIDS. Although awareness has increased about the disease over the past several years, the epidemic still marches on. There are over a million people in the United States living with AIDS/HIV, with 40,000 Americans being infected with HIV annually. There have been over 23 thousand cases of AIDS reported in Houston since 1981, and it is estimated that every nine hours, another person in our metro area contracts HIV. Sadly, many of the new cases come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are those least likely to be able to

afford treatment.

Fortunately, AFH, the organizer of AIDS Walk, has played a very active role in helping many underprivileged HIV/AIDS patients. Founded in 1982, AFH was Texas' first organization dedicated to HIV/AIDS education and services. Starting as a grassroots community agency, it is now a professionally managed human services organization which administers 43 separate programs funded by federal and state grants as well as corporate, foundation, and individual gifts. Its services include: counseling, case management for 500 families, affordable housing at seven apartment complexes and housing facilities, rental and utility assistance for 1,200 families, food and nutrition assistance for 2,000, employment counseling for 400 adults, and also operates 11 volunteer programs that provide additional support to clients

As you can see, the scope of what this organization is huge, which is fortunate. About 39% of its clients are homeless upon intake, and 100% are scared and confused about what lays ahead of them. AFH has undertaken the noble cause of giving sick people hope and providing them the tools with which to do so. It organizes

events like AIDS Walk, among others, to raise awareness and the funds so that it can continue doing what it is doing. It is up to volunteers to pledge of themselves time and money and in doing so, get a taste of altruism and community spirit.

UHD Students. We all live in Houston, a diverse, vibrant, and bustling city of light and opportunity. We are its citizens and members of the community, our community. Civic duty and a good heart tells us that we need to give back to the city that provides us our home. Let's get involved. There is no better way than with AIDS Walk and give back to our brothers and sisters who suffer from a terrifying and still often misunderstood illness. ■

## AFGHAN

continued from page 3

Karzai, is afraid of these gunmen.

These Afghan families have more than just appearances to worry about. The money Paramount paid the boys (\$12,000 for Zekeria & Ahmad, and \$9,000 for Ali) is not enough for their families to move, but is enough to

attract the attention of local thieves and kidnappers. Rohan Mohmand, an aspiring Afghan screenwriter, claimed, "I think they will be kidnapped because of the money. Money drives people crazy, especially in a place torn as Afghanistan for years." Mohmand speaks from personal experience.

What can be done? Though some say the boys should have known better than to sign the contract, many believe the bulk of the responsibility lies with Paramount for instigating the threat to their safety in the first place. The danger begins to loom as the release of the film grows nearer. Mohmand's opinion on the matter is clear: "It will cost not much for [Paramount] since it's a billion dollar company. [The families] will get into trouble because of money; it's not big money, yet they will be kidnapped [in November] for sure."

A grassroots campaign is in the works to get Paramount to assume responsibility for these families' safety. Anyone can sign the petition and contribute their grassroots ideas and opinions in the forum. More information can be found at [www.kiterunner.org](http://www.kiterunner.org). ■

# New Search Engine for ID Theft

By Monica Maza  
Dateline: DOWNTOWN

In the past several years, there has been a lot of hoopla in the news about 'identity theft.' Loosely, identity theft occurs when a criminal obtains a victim's credit card data, social security number, etc. and uses it without the victim's consent and knowledge. The majority of identity theft occurs online. Criminality has gone high tech, with crooks finding ways to get sensitive data on sites where buyers have to enter info like credit card number and date of birth, before proceeding to make purchases. But how can I find out if I have ever been a victim of such a scam?

StolenID Search allows anyone with an Internet connection to search a database of more than two million credit cards and Social Security numbers. This search engine was created by TrustedID, a company building its business on identity theft protection services. Scott Mitic, TrustedID's chief executive, claims that "without additional information, a credit card or Social Security number is useless because the "number has no value unless it comes with your name, billing address, expiration data, and security code."

Critics are already apprehensive about this new search engine because they believe it could become a resource for criminals. One such critic said that "TrustedID made a mistake in making the database accessible to anyone." If someone enters a credit card or Social Security number that the search engine says has not been compromised, a criminally minded individual may then see this as an opportunity. Mitic says that the company is

aware of this potential problem and is trying to build its database by "asking anyone who stumbles upon identity data online to submit it to the company." The company charges a \$90 annual fee to freeze individual credit accounts and issue fraud alerts.

Buzzing with curiosity, I went to [www.stolenidsearch.com](http://www.stolenidsearch.com) to see what I could find. The opening page is blank except for a box to enter a credit card or Social Security number to search. Not wanting to give my real information, I entered a different version of my own Social Security number and clicked search. A page popped up, giving me the good news that my number was not found in their database. Then came a disclaimer warning about the dangers of identity theft, and that, to stay ahead of criminals, I should sign up for the website's StolenID Monitor. This service will monitor up to three pieces of data for free and alert me if a match is found. If I sign up for this, I will be alerted by email if my information has been misused. The benefits, according to the website, are early detection and convenience. "In many cases StolenID Monitor will find your information after it is stolen but BEFORE it is used fraudulently. The service eliminates the need to return to the website and search on a regular basis.

The site also offers three blank boxes to enter three credit card or Social Security numbers and an email address. This page has links to other information about the company, so I clicked on the "About Us" hyperlink. TrustedID claims to be "the leading provider of innovative consumer tools and solutions to prevent ID theft. StolenID Search is a free service that tells you if your information has been stolen or compromised." Next I clicked on the Privacy link, which says that any information provided

through StolenID Search will be strictly confidential. "TrustedID purges all personal information unless the consumer explicitly asks them to monitor this information on their behalf and agrees to the services Terms and Conditions." In the fine print of legalese in the T&C section, the company accepts no liability for "any indirect, special, incidental, or consequential damages of any kind."

The big question here is: how safe is this search engine service? TrustedID claims to have built StolenID Search with the highest levels of security available on the Internet. The company states that they do not save any personal information provided unless we explicitly ask them to. Any information stored is then immediately encrypted. As for details on how they

protect our information, they only provide general steps that they take in order to protect their own security procedures.

- Any confidential information entered into the search engine is safely transferred in an encrypted format using Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology.
- TrustedID employees with access to customer information undergo thorough background checks. Access to information is strictly limited.
- A variety of techniques are used to provide multiple layers of protection against network or physical intrusion. The servers are constantly monitored for unauthorized access.

- The website has familiar indicators that include a small "lock" icon and the "s" in the web address bar that confirm the entire page is secure.

Even though this search engine has been featured in such reputable publications as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, and *Dateline*, the fact that we must enter our credit card and/or Social Security numbers into a box on the World Wide Web makes me nervous. I've always been taught that it's better to be safe than sorry. No matter how many disclaimers and warranties there are, the reality is that there are no guarantees once I provide my personal information and it starts floating around in cyberspace. ■

