

Former laser scientist Jonathan Tampico is among California's most-wanted criminals. At large for more than two years, pursued for thousands of miles and following numerous brushes with the law, the convicted child molester remains

## OUT of REACH

By David Ferris  
 STAFF WRITER

COLLEGE STATION, Texas

**O**n the night of Independence Day 1997, as fireworks smoke still hung in the air, a Texas A&M University police officer pulled over a black pickup for an illegal turn.

The officer's computer revealed the man at the wheel was no run-of-the-mill bad driver.

He was Jonathan Michael Tampico, a former Fremont resident who had served time for molesting a Livermore boy. The computer said he was wanted on a \$100,000 warrant on charges of hiding, in a Fremont storage locker, the biggest cache of child pornography ever found in the Bay Area.

Tampico was thrown into Brazos County jail, but released six days later because an appeals court had recalled the warrant.

For the fourth time, police and prosecutors in Alameda County watched helplessly as Tampico slipped beyond their grasp.

The 48-year-old former laser scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories remains at large despite 53 misdemeanor counts against him — one for each box of pornographic tapes, snapshots and film that police claim they found him hiding.

Tampico has walked away from police for more than two years in three states with the help of good timing, a persistent lawyer — and the possible trampling of his constitutional rights by police during his arrest. He has written a treatise on how to avoid police, which has made him a hero among Bay Area pedophiles, according to one source in the North American Man/Boy Love Association.

### On Tampico's trail

Jonathan Tampico, a 48-year-old former government laser scientist, has stayed one step ahead of Bay Area police five times in the nine years since he was first accused of child-exploitation crimes.



Tampico

**1. April 1989 — Livermore**

Jonathan Tampico is investigated on charges of molesting a boy, but police can't find him.

**2. May 22, 1989 — Bangkok, Thailand**

Tampico is arrested by Thai police as he readies to board a flight to Hong Kong.

**3. April 20, 1990 — Oakland**

Tampico is sentenced in Alameda County Superior Court to six years in state prison for child molestation.



**4. Oct. 2, 1992 — Tehachapi, Calif.**

Tampico, his sentence reduced by four years, is released from California state prison.

**5. Oct. 6, 1992 — Tacoma, Wash.**

Tampico arrives to settle down but returns to California amid protest from his neighbors.

**6. Late 1992 — Fremont**

Tampico returns to the Bay Area to a Fremont high-tech job, but police arrest him in September 1995 on suspicion of violating parole.

**7. Feb. 24, 1996 — San Quentin state prison**

Tampico, serving a nine-month sentence, is released three months early after an appeals court rules his arrest was illegal.

**8. May, 1996 — Columbia, Md.**

Acting on a tip, Maryland state police visit Tampico's father's house but learn Tampico left a week before.

**9. May, 1996 — Pasadena**

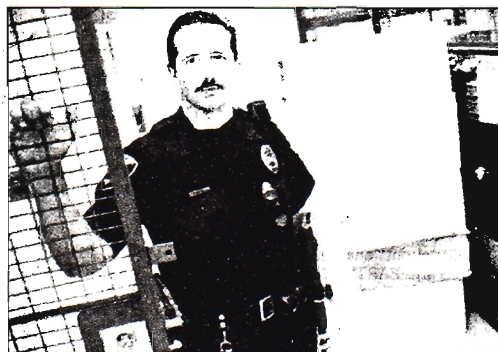
Tampico's abandoned Nissan Sentra is found in the parking lot of his mother's apartment complex.

**10. July 4, 1997 — College Station, Texas**

Tampico is jailed in Brazos County until officers learn his \$100,000 warrant has been recalled. Police haven't seen him since.

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TODD TRUMBULL — Staff



STEPHANIE SECREST — Staff

Fremont police Officer David Goodness stands in front of more than 53 boxes of items seized from convicted child molester Jonathan Tampico in what police say is the largest collection of child pornography ever found in the Bay Area.

### A virtual sanctuary for porn purveyors

By David Ferris  
 STAFF WRITER

So many people are using the Internet to lure children and swap pornography that investigators acknowledge they can't act on all the tips they get.

Federal agencies are as much as tripling their number of agents this year to pursue molesters and pornographers on the Internet, and are making more arrests. But because of limited resources, they put aside many leads and pursue only the major players.

Critics say investigators also lack the high-tech savvy of child exploiters, who are among the most sophisticated criminals on the Internet. And they complain that Bay Area cities, unlike some others,

Please see **Internet**, NEWS-9

#### Inside

► Spurred by remorse for unwittingly allowing her young son to sleep at a child molester's house, Debbie Mahoney has become an expert on pedophiles. **NEWS-9**

► The case was the biggest police surveillance effort in Fremont history. **NEWS-8**

► Internet safety tips. **NEWS-9**

# Tampico: Largest stash of pornography seen in Bay Area

Continued from NEWS-1

Since Texas, police and prosecutors have reinstated his warrant and increased it tenfold to \$1 million. They have charged him with a new felony, have added him to the list of the state's most-wanted criminals, and have tried to put federal agents on his trail.

Authorities say the pornography they found depicts hundreds of victims and that Tampico will molest again.

But Tampico's lawyer, Bruce Nickerson, said the California Court of Appeals may soon dismiss the pornography case. Nickerson has partially won two rulings in that court.

Nickerson said police and prosecutors arrested his client without grounds, did their search illegally and then dragged their feet. Law enforcement's quest for Tampico, he said, is no longer a search for justice but a vendetta.

## Vacations hide child abuse

Tampico and three other Bay Area men were arrested in 1989 in an investigation that led to the conviction of 20 molesters across the state and nation.

The Bay Area men seemed a god-send to single mothers raising young boys who needed role models, according to court records.

The single men treated the boys to Nintendo video games, trips to Steinhart Aquarium in San Francisco, hikes in Yosemite, and beach romps in Mexico. Court records show the children, aged 6 to their early teens, trusted their mentors enough to engage in sex acts and keep them secret from their mothers.

At the same time, the men laid elaborate plans for the day they might be arrested.

One Hayward businessman kept sensitive phone numbers in a watch that could be deprogrammed in seconds. Upon arresting Tampico, police found an "escape kit" that included

fresh clothes, a Portuguese phrasebook and a passport, court records show.

Tampico — a brilliant engineer, a former member of the National Guard and an accomplished sailor — realized in high school that he was attracted to boys, court records reveal.

But unlike the other men, he didn't molest a lot of youngsters.

"Jonathan is a fairly quiet, sensitive, artistic and highly intelligent man," an informant told investigators in court records. "He does not run around with a thousand kids. He lands on one and sticks with it for a long time."

In 1982, Tampico found such a boy when Debbie Mahoney and her son moved in next door on Second Street in Livermore.

Tampico and Mahoney both wore the green badge of Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, where she was a security officer.

The neighbors become so close that they cut down Christmas trees and opened presents together. Mahoney's boy would go to Tampico's for sleepovers. In 1985, court records show, Tampico launched a sexual relationship with the 12-year-old that would last two years.

"He was like a father to me," the victim, now 24, recounted on MTV special about child molestation. He refuses newspaper interviews. "(Tampico) taught me how to drive a car when I was 10. I didn't tell my mom at all about it because I was scared. I didn't know how she was going to react."

When police started investigating the case in 1989, Tampico disappeared. He surfaced in May that year in Bangkok, Thailand, where he may have been traveling as a "sex tourist" with Thai child prostitutes, according to court records.

Thai police arrested him and held him 16 days in jail. Two Livermore detectives then picked up their suspect, who was emaciated with diarrhea.

Tampico pleaded guilty in January 1990 to a single count of child molestation, while 11 other felony charges were dropped. He was sentenced to six years in state prison, which were later reduced to two for good behavior.

At his sentencing, Tampico apologized but said he also helped the boy by making him lunches, driving him to school and looking after him during illnesses.

"Knowing my attraction to boys, I managed to avoid any sexual activity with (boys) for many years, until the special circumstances of close proximity, attractiveness and willingness on (the boy's) part combined to tempt me beyond my ability to refrain," he said.

## Parole check leads to stash

When released in October 1992 from state prison in Tehachapi, Tampico drove straight to Tacoma, Wash. But he turned back after police posted signs calling him a high-risk sex offender and residents made an uproar.

He moved to Fremont, where he got a job as a network administrator with a high-tech company and lived in an apartment on L Street in the Niles district. In June 1995, Fremont detective David Goodness visited the apartment with Tampico's parole officer on a parole check.

Pictures of boys were everywhere, "like pictures you have on your desk of your son," Goodness said. "It didn't seem he was rehabilitated."

Goodness arranged for seven days of surveillance. On Sept. 12, 1995, police raided Tampico's apartment on suspicion he had violated parole.

They found pictures of boys in sex acts by Tampico's computer and in his bedroom. With a search warrant, they entered the storage unit, which Tampico apparently was keeping under a false name.

There, police found a multimedia library of lewd material — computer dis-

kettes, magazines, homemade videotapes, Polaroids, negatives, slides, prints, 16mm and 8mm film reels — some of it dating back to the 1950s.

Experienced Bay Area detectives declared it the largest such stash they had ever seen.

It was also, in Goodness' words, an investigator's "holy grail." Police had heard of central collection points where child molesters hid their pictures, but had never found one.

Tampico, a skilled photographer, may have amassed much of his collection as payment for developing others' photos in his personal darkroom, court records said.

It took Goodness and other detectives a month to sort through and document the evidence. The police chief called in a psychologist to counsel them.

Meanwhile, Tampico headed back to prison — this time to San Quentin — to serve a nine-month term for violating parole.

In a letter written to judges from prison, he claimed his arrest was illegal because of another judge's miscalculation years before.

Tampico realized the judge who sentenced him had added wrong and left out his time in the Thailand jail. This meant Tampico's probation should have ended Aug. 24, 1995 — almost three weeks before Fremont police searched him.

In February 1996, after months of legal wrangling, a three-judge panel at the California Court of Appeals in San Francisco ordered Tampico freed. The judges said he was incarcerated for months because of "erroneous information, erroneous rulings and unnecessary delays."

A day later, he walked out. Fremont police and prosecutors watched in frustration. They lodged their pornography case, issued a \$100,000 warrant, and waited.

In May, police got a tip that Tampico

was living at his father's house in Columbia, Md. But when Maryland state police knocked at the door, they learned he had left a week earlier.

The next week, Tampico's Nissan Sentra was found, dusty and cobwebby, in a parking stall at his mother's apartment complex in Pasadena.

And on July 4, 1997, came Tampico's Texas arrest and subsequent release.

## Nowhere to be found

In Tampico's absence, his lawyer waging a persistent campaign to get the case dismissed.

Nickerson has taken the fight to the California Court of Appeals twice on procedural motions to suppress the evidence seized in the search and get an evidence hearing. He has won elements of his argument both times.

Now, the Alameda County Superior Court is considering a motion to get the whole case thrown out.

Nickerson said his client is being harassed because he's an articulate man who spoke out for "boy love" in the blaze of publicity he received while trying to move to Washington.

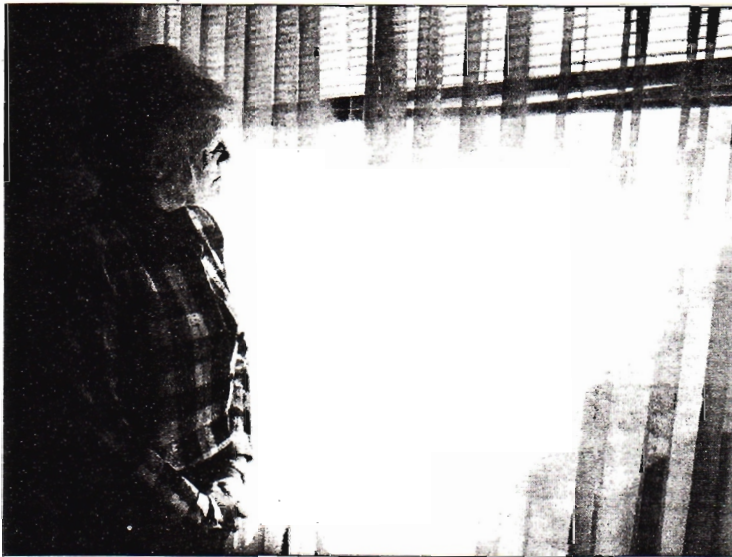
"The bottom line is that they are determined to harass this man by any means whatsoever," Nickerson said. "There's dirty pool somewhere."

Where is Tampico now? His lawyer said he doesn't know. Some believe Tampico is abroad, in a country in Asia or the Caribbean, where the pedophile laws aren't so strict.

Police and prosecutors don't know either, but say they are sure wherever he is, he continues to molest.

"He's had a charmed life," said Richard Klemmer, assistant district attorney in Fremont. "Everywhere you look, there's something bizarre going on. I don't think I've had a case quite as convoluted as this. We just keep going 'round and 'round and 'round.'"

# JONATHAN TAMPICO OUT OF REACH



RAY CHAVEZ — Staff

Debbie Mahoney works full-time from her Tracy home — without pay — as an advocate for protecting children from pornographers and stalkers on the Internet.

## Mother's anger fosters action against molesters

Tampico victimized 12-year-old son

By David Ferris  
STAFF WRITER

TRACY — Nine years ago, Debbie Mahoney didn't know the meaning of the word "pedophile." That was before she learned she had been sending her only son to sleep at a molester's house.

A Livermore detective called her in April 1989 to say he suspected Jonathan Tampico — her co-worker, former neighbor and good friend — of seducing her 12-year-old son into a two-year sexual relationship.

"I didn't know anything," Mahoney, 47, said at her house in Tracy. "The first two years (after) this thing, I went around like a zombie."

Spurred by anger at Tampico and remorse at her former ignorance, she has become an expert on child molesters.

She helped pass landmark legislation to make information on sex offenders available to the public. And in 1996, she quit her job for an unpaid career that has made her an authority on children's safety on the Internet.

These days, Mahoney doesn't cry when she speaks of her son's ordeal. But her eyes still glisten with emotion, though she's told the story so many times to senators, town hall assemblies, even Oprah Winfrey.

Earlier this month, Mahoney appeared on both the A&E cable network and The Oprah Winfrey Show. And in March, a company that makes Web site blocking software flew her to Washington, D.C., to advise Capitol Hill staffers on Internet safety issues.

As head of Safeguarding Our Children — United Mothers, Mahoney also converses through e-mail with parents of molested children and tries to expose sexual predators on the Internet.

She urges parents to listen closely to their children. Molested youngsters might know the acts they engage in are wrong yet feel some pleasure in them, she said.

"We didn't talk to our kids then. And we don't talk to our kids now," said Mahoney. "We don't listen. We don't hear when they're telling us something."

Mahoney's activism began in 1993, after her son's molester was released from prison. Mahoney wanted to warn Tampico's new neighbors, but the police were forbidden by law to tell her his whereabouts.

She came across Barbara Alby, a Sacramento-area Assemblywoman who was introducing a bill to create a state 1-900 phone line for people to find out if neighbors had a history of sex crimes.

But the proposal encountered great resistance from Capitol lawmakers who wanted to pro-

tect sex offenders' privacy rights.

"They told me this would never pass in California," Mahoney said. "Don't tell me something can't happen."

In what she described as an "all-out war," Mahoney and a friend stopped shoppers at Wal-Mart with petitions, spoke at town hall meetings and appeared on any radio, television or editorial page that would have them.

The 1-900 bill became the first such law in the nation in 1994. Since then, the phone line has received more than 22,000 inquiries and identified about 2,000 offenders, according to the state Attorney General's office.

Legislative staff who worked on the bill said Mahoney and other mothers of victims provided the energy and moral authority to persuade reluctant lawmakers.

The bill is widely credited for easing the passage in 1996 of "Megan's Law," which makes available information on offenders at local police stations.

Despite the impact she's had, Mahoney still shakes her head to think that she was oblivious to her son's violation.

"I wanted him to know I wasn't going to sit down and let (Tampico) do it again," she said of her son, now in his 20s. "It's never been an issue of having a choice. I look at it as something anyone would do."

## Internet: Thousands of leads

Continued from NEWS-1

are not working together to protect children from Internet predators. The result, child advocates said, is that some molesters fall through the cracks.

"Unless you actually lay everything in their laps, nothing seems to get done," according to a member of the North American Man/Boy Love Association who said he knows many local child molesters and has passed on leads to investigators. "It's so easy to get these guys. It drives me crazy."

With thousands of leads, investigators said they focus on people who transmit or receive large amounts of child pornography or cross state lines possibly to molest a child. They pass on to local police any leads they can place, and file the rest.

"We're mindful of who these people are," said Federal Bureau of Investigation agent Larry Foust. "(But) we're not looking for minor players. We're looking for people with a persistent interest."

For example, investigators don't pursue everyone who downloads child pornography from the Internet, although it is a federal crime. Customs and FBI sources said.

"If you put every law enforcement officer in the world on this (area), you would still have stuff left over," said Layne Latham, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Customs Service, which has been investigating Internet-related child crimes since 1989.

The FBI's program to crack down on Internet child molesters is also not yet expected to keep pace with all leads, according to Foust.

"We're still at the embryonic state," he said of the "Innocent Images" program founded in 1995. "We're just scratching the surface."

Customs and the FBI both said they are expanding their efforts against child exploitation.

This year alone, the agencies together have upped their funding to investigate such crimes by \$12 million. Their efforts have paid off with more search warrants, arrests and prosecutions.

The Innocent Images program has resulted in 161 arrests and 184 convictions through March. The program this year is tripling its number of agents to 37, adding analysts and equipment, and training local officers across the country in computer investigative techniques.

Yet the program's \$10 million funding is still just a sliver of the FBI's \$2.8 billion budget. And its staff is dwarfed by the agency's 11,000 workforce.

Customs has been even more successful in tracking down child molesters. Between 1995 and 1997, Customs arrested 329 people and made 287 con-

### SAFETY on the NET

The Federal Bureau of Investigation offers the following tips for children on the Internet:

- Never give out information such as your name, home address, school name or telephone number in a public message, in chat rooms or bulletin boards. Never send anyone your picture without checking with your parent or guardian.
- Never respond to messages or bulletin boards that are suggestive, obscene, belligerent, threatening or make you uncomfortable.
- Be careful when someone offers you something for nothing, such as gifts or money. Be very careful about offers that involve your coming to a meeting or having someone visit your house.
- Tell your parent or guardian right away if you come across information that makes you uncomfortable.
- Never arrange a face-to-face meeting without telling your parent or guardian. If you meet, do so in a public place with a parent or guardian.
- Remember that people online may not be who they seem. Since you can't see or even hear them, people can easily misrepresent themselves. Someone claiming to be a 12-year-old girl could be an older man.
- Be sure you are dealing with someone you and your parents know and trust before giving out personal information about yourself via e-mail.
- Get to know your "online friends" just as you get to know all your other friends.

Information on the Internet that might lead to a child molester or pornographer may be sent to law enforcement through the 24-hours-a-day CyberTipLine operated by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at [www.missingkids.com/cybertip](http://www.missingkids.com/cybertip) or (800) 843-5678.

The website for "Safeguarding Our Children — United Mothers" is at [www.soc-um.org](http://www.soc-um.org).

victions, according to Latham. But Customs dedicates only about \$1 million of its \$1.69 billion budget to its "cyber-smuggling" unit, which focuses mainly on child exploitation crimes. Each of Customs' 144 field offices nationwide also has someone trained in computer investigations.

Both agencies said they will ask Congress for more money and agents, but declined to discuss how much. Lawmakers who have championed the funding so far agree more money is needed.

"I don't think (FBI's 1998 funding is) going to take care of it. It's a down payment on trying to get a handle on the problem early," said Ed Amorosi, spokesman for Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H.

But Bay Area child advocates said federal endeavors so far, particularly by the FBI, are not good enough.

"Do they only investigate bank robbers when they have the robbers' first and last names and the serial numbers of all the bills?" asked Mike Echols, a Bay Area author of several books on child molestation.

Some child advocates said they had passed on names, phone numbers, Web sites and screen names of likely child molesters to the FBI, but have never heard of any investigations or arrests.

The FBI's Foust said the agency is constrained by law from discussing specific cases with anyone, even those who provide the leads.

It's difficult to measure if investigators have made a dent in child molestation cases because nobody knows just how many molesters and pornographers use the Internet.

But a national "cyber" tip line that debuted in March generated 400 leads its first two weeks. The line serves federal investigators and is operated by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The state Department of Justice reports that 47,000 California residents have committed child-related sex offenses. And a typical child molester has more than 70 victims during his lifetime, according to the FBI.

Regional partnerships between federal and local police and prosecutors to crack child molester networks have begun in a few regions, but not in the Bay Area.

"We'd like to see them working with each other," said the NAMBLA member. "They don't seem to communicate."

In the Los Angeles area, a child exploitation task force focusing on computer crimes was started less than two years ago and has investigated 100 cases, said Randy Aden, the FBI agent who leads the effort.

On the force are the FBI, Customs, U.S. Postal Service, U.S. Navy, state departments of justice and corrections, federal and county prosecutors and local sheriffs and police.

Similar forces have been started or are being planned in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and two locations each in Texas and Florida.

In the Bay Area, the San Jose Police Department leads the way in Internet child molestation investigations and trains officers across the country.

## JONATHAN TAMPICO OUT OF REACH

# Stakeout led police to tail Tampico by car, boat, airplane

By David Ferris  
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — The quest to arrest Jonathan Tampico was the biggest police surveillance effort in the 42-year history of Fremont.

In 1995, police believed the convicted molester might be the nexus of a network of "boy lovers" who took children to a secret spot in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Police followed him by plane and

boat with techniques that would have done James Bond proud. But in the end, simply following him by car and on foot led to his arrest.

In June, detectives followed Tampico by car to the Henry J. Kaiser Convention Center in Oakland. There, they saw him watch boys in the public bathroom during a children's choir festival in a violation of his parole, according to court records.

The next day, they saw him visit a storage facility in Fremont, the court

records said.

Then in August, a state Department of Justice plane — painted blue to match the sky and equipped with a muffled engine — followed Tampico around Fremont at 500 feet for three days. It kept in constant radio contact with a car trailing Tampico a few blocks behind.

But Tampico just worked and did chores.

One weekend, Tampico drove to Alameda Harbor to board a friend's sail-

boat for a race to Santa Cruz. The Coast Guard had already photographed the boat, and harbor police followed it out of San Francisco Bay and into the Santa Cruz marina.

A few spaces from where Tampico docked, three Fremont detectives watched from a borrowed boat.

The next day, other detectives followed Tampico on the beach. They watched him have a drink with his friends in a restaurant.

But Tampico never even approached

the children playing on the shore.

Police decided there was no point in waiting further. On Sept. 12, two state parole officers and five Fremont police officers knocked on Tampico's door and arrested him on a charge of violating his parole in June.

One search warrant later, court records said, they found the storage locker Tampico visited held 53 boxes of child pornography and erotica — the largest such haul ever found in the Bay Area.