

Students warned of Facebook dangers

By Dennis Nartker

Sunday, October 23, 2011, 12:00am

KENDALLVILLE — “When you post information on the Internet, it’s there forever, *forever*.”

Combining humor and sincerity, theatrics and real-life, sometimes sobering examples of the positives and negatives of the online world, Josh Gunderson presented a one-hour program titled “Hooked on Facebook” to East Noble students Friday about the dangers of social networking.

He emphasized more than once for students to think before posting anything online.

“Think what effect it will have on you and others,” he said.

Gunderson, 24, a 2009 graduate of Salem State University outside Boston, with a double major in English and theater, travels the country speaking to young people on their level using references to movies and TV shows, technical terminology and interactive occasions youth are familiar with while in school or with friends. His PowerPoint presentation is enhanced with audience participation and his own experience with bullies in school.

Facebook users spend an average of 93 minutes a day on the social network, according to Gunderson. Facebook users have an average of 300 “friends,” with 30 to 40 percent of those they’ve never met face-to-face.

“People don’t realize there is always someone watching their account,” he said.

Gunderson warned students about giving out too much personal information that strangers can use to track them down.

“You never fully know who is out there watching,” he said. He warned about the consequences of “sexting,” or sending sexual explicit photos over the Internet, and described an incident of “sexting” that resulted in a group of 14- and 15-year-olds being charged with child pornography, expelled from school and registered as sex offenders. Every college admissions staff, every employer can look up their record, he said.

Referring to bullying that goes on through the Internet, Gunderson related true stories of teens committing suicide because of such harassment. He told the story of a group of girls at one school who didn’t like a freshman girl dating a popular senior boy. They harassed her into committing suicide. Investigators later found a text message one of the girls sent that said, “mission accomplished.”

Gunderson advised victims of online bullying not to respond or retaliate, save the evidence and block the bullies, adding, "Get them out of your lives and talk to an adult."

He was scheduled to speak to students in grades 5-12 in four sessions Friday.