

Sex, and murder, for sale

Craigslist's seamy side among the mundane

By **KRISTI L. GUSTAFSON**
Staff writer

Many people think of Craigslist as simply an online place to list your garage sale or find a job, but the site has a less-than-respectable side as well.

Craigslist is a hub of prostitution, sex rings and other illicit affairs, says Inspector John Burke, who heads the Albany County Sheriff's Department vice crimes unit.

Since August 2007, more than 500 Craigslist-related crimes have been documented, according to French Reynolds, a Charlotte, N.C.-based crime news blogger who has a section of his site dedicated to criminal activity on Craigslist.

With a stat like that, it's no surprise Burke calls Craigslist dangerous and discourages anyone from using it — even to buy a stroller or find a job.

What he considers most suspect: the personals. This portion is broken down into nine subcategories such as "strictly platonic," "women seeking men" and things like "casual encounters," ads for one-night stands.

Pretty much everyone in the personal ads section is looking for one thing, says Burke: sex. Many times, paid sex. He cautions everyone to stay far, far away, saying unseemly people lurk in here and you never know what they may be capable of — violence, STD transmission, murder.

"It's an open-air sex market. All sex, all the time, 24-7," says Burke, who polices Craigslist for the Sheriff's Department. "No one in their right mind should be involved in

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MARK GARFINKEL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON UNIVERSITY medical student Philip Markoff stands during his arraignment in Boston Municipal Court. Markoff has been ordered held without bail on charges that he fatally shot a masseuse, Julissa Brisman, 26, of New York.



CRAIGSLIST: Police warn of a seamy side

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the erotic or therapeutic services on this site."

Saucy offerings, and other suspect ads, are not reserved for the personals, but appear all over the site.

Take the "Adult gigs" section. A recent ad we found offered 17-to-20-year-olds \$200 "TO MAKE SOME ONES (sic) NIGHT AT THE PROM!!!"

Think it's safe to find someone to fix your transmission or unknot those painful muscles?

Think again. Even if the business seems legit (e.g. has an official-sounding name and lists an address and phone number), people should be wary. The mechanic may not be licensed, and the masseuse may be looking to do more than relieve your kinks.

As for the more expected side of

classifieds — you know, the portion where you buy goods, not services — those can be iffy, too, Burke says.

You don't know the house you're going to for a kitchen table really has a table, or if some sicko is trying to lure you in. And you certainly don't want to let the seller come to your home, for the same reasons.

The Times Union tried to con-

tact Craigslist spokeswoman Susan MacTavish for comment, but our phone call and e-mails were not returned.

"There is nothing there for me to say trust Craigslist whatsoever," Burke says. "One hundred percent of what I do on Craigslist is bad."

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Murder charges shock UAlbany classmates

By **CHRISTEN GOWAN**
and **SHARON HONG**

Staff writers and wire reports

ALBANY — Philip Markoff drew no attention from local police during his four years as an undergraduate student at UAlbany, and his arrest on charges he is the suspected Craigslist killer has left former classmates and friends shocked.

The 23-year-old Boston University medical student is accused of killing a woman he met through the Craigslist Web site and robbing another he met the same way. He was arrested Monday and arraigned Tuesday in Municipal Court in Boston where he remains held without bail.

"I thought he was a straight edge," said Ryan Meikle, a former college classmate of Markoff's who was his lab partner for several years. Meikle described Markoff as a "nerdy science lover," adding that he was "still in awe" over news his one-time classmate has been implicated in the high-profile case.

A critical piece of evidence used in Markoff's arrest was his IP address, which investigators traced using his correspondence with the women over the Internet, according to Jake Wark, press officer for the Suffolk County District Attorney.

An archived Craigslist posting tracked by the Times Union also seems to indicate that Markoff had at one time posted his own advertisements offering massage services

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