

# Some divorced parents pushing for 'virtual' visits

By ANN SANNER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## SPRINGFIELD, Ill.

Divorce put David List and his 2-year-old daughter on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and he worried that she would soon forget him. She hasn't, though. List's divorce agreement guaranteed him "virtual visitation," the chance to talk with his daughter through an Internet video connection.

He and Ruby Rose, now 5, usually connect at least twice a week. The chats sustain them in between their in-person visits, which come only a few times a year.

"When she gets off the plane, I know what she had for dinner last night," said List, 49, of Santa Cruz, Calif. "She'll run right up to me and jump in my arms because I know exactly what she's all about."

Advocates of virtual visitation want states to spell out in their laws that judges can make it part of a divorce agreement.

The benefits go beyond helping parents and children stay close, supporters argue. They say noncustodial parents are more likely to pay child support reg-



David List visits with his daughter, Ruby Rose, who lives in England, via the Internet on a Webcam in Aptos, Calif. List's divorce agreement guaranteed him "virtual visitation."

ularly if they can stay in touch, and electronic visits can help keep children from getting caught up in fights when bickering exes meet in person.

Utah made virtual visitation an offi-

cial option in 2004, and similar legislation awaits the governor's signature in Wisconsin. Illinois, Missouri and Virginia lawmakers have introduced proposals, too.

"A telephone can only go so far," said Republican state Rep. Ruth Munson of Illinois.

The idea has its critics, though, who fear judges might use the option of virtual visitation as justification for ordering fewer real visits with children or letting one parent move away with the children.

"Real parents need real time. Real kids need real time," said David L. Levy, director of the Children's Rights Council. "It can be a wonderful accessory, but the danger is that it will be used as a substitute for real visitation."

Virtual visitation agreements can cover things as mundane as telephone calls, e-mail and instant messages, but the focus is on video connections.

With the technology becoming more commonplace and affordable, divorce lawyers say more parents are using it, often without any formal court agreement.

But many lawyers and judges are still unaware of it.

"I think that it is an evolution and, unfortunately, a lot of older attorneys aren't even aware that it is an option," said Cheryl Hepper, president of the American Academy of Matrimonial

Lawyers and a Rockville, Md., attorney. Hepper said she has seen cases where virtual visitation helped keep the peace between exes because seeing the child's face eased the absent parent's fear that the child was being manipulated or monitored.

She also called it common sense that parents using virtual visitation would be more willing to pay child support.

"In my experience, I have found that parents who feel connected to their children are much more invested and much more gracious," Hepper said.

While most judges already can authorize virtual visitation, they hesitate to order it because it's not addressed in the laws, experts said. Lawyers can be reluctant to fight for it for the same reason.

Utah passed its law partly because of efforts by divorced dad Michael Gough, who went to court to obtain virtual visitation rights after his daughter moved to Wisconsin. For the last two years, he and Saige, now 6, have used Webcams to talk.

"I saw her first loose tooth. I saw her haircut, new outfits, things you want to see on a daily basis but you can't in person," Gough said.

# Edinburgh graduate named 500 Festival princess

**S**tacy Dixon of Franklin has been selected as one of 33 princesses for the Indianapolis 500 Festival.



DIXON

A sophomore at Ball State University, she is majoring in interior design and plans to pursue a career in commercial design.

A 2004 graduate of Edinburgh Community High School, she was class valedictorian, a member of the high school tennis team and a 10-year 4-H participant.

Dixon said the interview process was demanding at times. Candidates attend two rounds of four interviews.

She'll face another interview before the festival queen is named May 20.

Dixon, the daughter of Stephen and Rebecca Dixon, was 2002 Johnson County fair queen.

Alyssa Milenbaugh of Greenwood was recently named Miss Teen Indiana International and will represent Indiana in the



Annette Jones  
PEOPLE

national pageant in Chicago in July.

She is a freshman at Center Grove High School, where she is a cheerleader, Student Congress senator and a member of the Dramatics Speech Club and Key Club. She is in the chorus for the spring musical "Anything Goes."

She is active at Mount Pleasant Christian Church, has helped with hurricane relief and is involved in service work and fund-raisers.

Milenbaugh also participates in gymnastics and dance.



MILENBAUGH

The Ed Wessell family of Trafalgar was recognized by the American Angus Association for having two registered Angus cows included in the association's 2006 Pathfinder Report.

The report identifies superior Angus cows based on recorded performance traits that are economically important to efficient beef production.

Only 2,187 of the more than 34,000 association members are represented in this year's report.

Four state employees from Johnson County were honored recently by Gov. Mitch Daniels for their achievements in public service.

The four employees and the departments they work for are:

- **Bruce Baxter** of Greenwood, State Personnel Office
- **Cynthia Thompson** of Greenwood, Bureau of Motor Vehicles
- **Kimberly Earles** of Franklin, Family and Social Services Administration
- **Todd Hite** of Greenwood, Department of Health.

The first of the governors' Public Service Achievement Awards went to 52 state employ-

ees representing 21 agencies. The employees honored each received a medal and \$1,000.

**John D. Norman**, a member of the Center Grove High School marching band, has been selected to participate in the 46th annual Indiana All-State High School Band Festival.

Nearly 900 high school musicians applied to audition, and 167 members were selected to participate.

Musicians will attend practice and then present a concert at 2:30 p.m. March 12 at the Musical Arts Center on the Indiana University campus.

**Teresa Cook**, sixth-grade science and writing teacher at Clark-Pleasant Intermediate School, was recently awarded a \$1,000 grant from the Spaetti Youth Education program. Cook will use the grant money to teach her students about the function of water systems and the importance of clean water.

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# Personal

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new job to participate in a mission trip to Mexico scheduled for June.

She isn't nervous about her first day, Souders said as she washed a couple of blenders with a large brush.

She dipped the blenders into a sanitizing solution, placed them on a drying rack and returned to the front of the store when she heard Stahl greet another customer.

Souders more confidently filled the next order, a peanut butter milkshake.

"Here you go, sir," she said as she handed the milkshake out of the store window.

Stahl first put on a Ritter's Frozen Custard apron 15 years ago. He has been training employees for 11 years.

He teaches employees how to do all the tasks in the business: washing dishes, taking out trash, using the cash register and scooping, weighing and decorating sundae specialties.

Most young employees show more ability in one area or another, he said. They might be shy about greeting customers, but they happen to be fast and

efficient at filling orders.

It is too early to tell what task Souders will feel most comfortable doing, but it is important for her to tackle all responsibilities, Stahl said.

When lots of customers line up at both windows to order, Ritter's employees have to know how to pitch in where they are needed, he said.

Stahl returned to the row of giant posters and turned to quiz Souders: "Does everything with whipped cream get a cherry?"

"Yes," she answered. "Everything except smoothies." A few minutes later, Stahl gives Souders an order for a mocha cappuccino smoothie.

Stahl showed her the ingredients, including chocolate syrup, coffee flavoring and custard.

Souders struggled a bit to get the lid tightly sealed on the blender.

"Smoothies get a dome lid," Stahl said as he placed the lid on top of the cup.

"Now, we'll get you some practice with the whipped cream," he said.

Souders coated the smoothie with thin ribbons of whipped cream.

"Everything with whipped cream gets a cherry except what?" Stahl asked.

"A smoothie," Souders said. "Good job," Stahl said.

# TV

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up to their claims?

The other major argument raised for a la carte: It will save you money.

Despite getting (and paying for) scores of channels, the average household tunes to only 17.

By hand-picking those channels, a subscriber could trim his cable bill by as much as 13 percent.

At least, those are findings from a recent FCC report, which contradicts an earlier study that declared a la carte pricing would likely drive up cable costs.

But while acknowledging research errors in its 2004 study, the consulting firm of Booz Allen Hamilton stands by its conclusions.

In particular, it cautions that, with a la carte, diversity would suffer.

A significant number of cable networks, including those that offer innovative and untested

formats, will be forced out of business before they have a chance to build the audience they need to become profitable."

I'm reminded of a professor who forcefully discounted the old saying, "I know what I like."

Her retort: "You like what you know."

Echoing that sentiment in TV terms is Geraldine Laybourne, who, as head of Oxygen Media, is one of several cable network bosses who have spoken out against the a la carte plan.

"TV viewers," she said in a recent statement, "often don't know what they want to watch until it's there for them as an option."

Viewers may indeed concentrate on only 17 channels. But over time that 17 could vary.

Viewers' tastes change and what they choose to watch can reflect that, if the options are there.

I, who had no interest in AMC for its movies, was snagged in January by its charming new caper drama "Hustle."

Every now and then G4 (Video Game Television) catches my eye, and I'm not even a gamer.

After sampling Current TV, the youth-oriented news-features network, I find I'm defaulting to it the way I used to gravitate to CNN.

And I haven't mentioned my 11-year-old, who has kicked his Nickelodeon habit in favor of watching basketball and "The Simpsons."

In a media world that's a little too targeted and partitioned for my taste, I think there's value in breaking out of the rut; in indulging a whim or just stumbling across something you would never have thought to watch. Serendipity TV.

Sure, a la carte holds out the dual promises of saving you money and preserving your children's virtue.

Sounds great. Everyone knows cable rates are too high and forever getting higher. And no one wants kids watching trashy TV.

But would a la carte make a dent in either problem?

Not likely.

I just think it could reduce viewing choices to a short-order menu's dimensions. I prefer (pardon my French) a buffet.

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Mt. Auburn Christian Children's Ministry  
Annual Open House

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6:30 to 8:00 pm

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"I was scared I wouldn't live to see my kids grow up."

JENNIFER GALLOWAY, Elizabethtown

Jennifer had always been an optimistic person. But her lifelong battle with weight had created more health problems than she could ignore. "Food had always been my best friend," she says, "and my best friend was killing me." Bariatric surgery at Johnson Memorial was a life-saving intervention for Jennifer. "They told me it wasn't a quick fix. They said I'd have to change my lifestyle. But they treated me like a human being. They really took care of me, body and soul."

Read Jennifer's story at [www.johnsonmemorial.org/jennifer](http://www.johnsonmemorial.org/jennifer). Or call our Bariatric Surgery Coordinator, Eileen Williams, toll-free at **866-837-0531** to register for one of our free seminars. A bariatric success story herself, Eileen will give you a first-hand account of what you can expect from our program.

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