UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

Case No.

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION,

Plaintiff.

01 3369

CIV-LENARD

FAMILIES ON LINE CORPORATION, MARK C. THURMAN, and ROBERT D. FIENE,

v.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE
TURNOFF

Defendants.

COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE AND OTHER RELIEF

Plaintiff, Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC" or "Commission"), alleges and states as follows:

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission brings this action to enjoin and restrain Defendants from violating the federal securities laws in connection with a fraudulent, unregistered offering of securities issued by Families On Line Corporation ("FOL" or the "Company"), and to prevent FOL's chief executive officer, Mark C. Thurman ("Thurman"), and its chief operating officer, Robert D. Fiene ("Fiene"), from further misappropriating and dissipating investor funds.

Commencing in July 1999 through December 2000, Defendants raised \$3.9 million from approximately 410 investors nationwide – primarily fundamentalist Christians – through two private placement offerings. FOL purports to offer "filtered" access to the Internet, i.e., Internet access free of sexual content, violence, gambling, and other similar content. Defendants provided investors and potential investors with false and misleading offering documents and

placed those materials on FOL's Internet web site. Defendants made material misrepresentations and omissions to investors concerning, among other things, the use of investor funds, the existence of a marketing agreement with a Christian-based television network, the amount of actual and projected subscribers to the FOL Internet service, and a purported agreement with a registered broker-dealer to underwrite an FOL initial public offering ("IPO"). Moreover, not only did FOL's offering materials misrepresent Thurman's and Fiene's backgrounds, they failed to disclose that both are convicted felons. Thurman and Fiene have diverted at least \$1.8 million of investor funds for their own use, including using investor funds to purchase luxury vehicles, vacations, and merchandise from stores that specialize in drug paraphernalia and adult novelty items.

II. DEFENDANTS

- 2. **FOL** is the issuer of the securities offered and sold to investors in the fraudulent scheme. FOL has been registered as a Florida corporation since August 1999. FOL is located at 2400 East Commercial Boulevard, Suite 423, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33308. No registration statement has been filed or is in effect with the Commission in connection with any of the securities being offered and sold by FOL. The FOL offerings are not exempt from registration with the Commission.
- 3. Mark C. Thurman, age 42, resides in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Thurman is FOL's chairman and chief executive officer ("CEO"). Thurman's extensive criminal history includes felony convictions for grand theft, wire fraud, and criminal possession of a forged instrument. Thurman is not registered with the Commission in any capacity.

4. Robert D. Fiene, age 30, resides in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Fiene is FOL's chief operating officer. Fiene was convicted of burglary, armed robbery and grand theft. Fiene is not registered with the Commission in any capacity.

III. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

- 5. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to Sections 20(b), 20(d) and 22(a) of the Securities Act of 1933 ("Securities Act"), 15 U.S.C. §§ 77t(b), 77t(d), and 77v(a), and Sections 21(d), 21(e), and 27 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 ("Exchange Act"), 15 U.S.C. §§ 78u(d), 78u(e) and 78aa. These provisions authorize the Commission to seek the imposition of civil money penalties for violations of the federal securities laws.
- 6. Venue is appropriate in the Southern District of Florida. Certain of the acts and transactions constituting violations of the Securities Act and the Exchange Act have occurred within the Southern District of Florida. The principal offices of Defendant FOL are located in the Southern District of Florida, and the individual Defendants, Thurman and Fiene, both reside in the Southern District of Florida. Defendants have engaged in the acts, transactions, and practices complained of herein within the Southern District of Florida.
- 7. Defendants, directly and indirectly, have made use of the means and instrumentalities of interstate commerce, the means and instruments of transportation and communication in interstate commerce, and the mails, in connection with the acts, practices, and courses of business complained of herein.

IV. DEFENDANTS' FRAUDULENT OFFERING AND MISAPPROPRIATION

A. FOL's Business And Thurman's And Fiene's Roles

- 8. FOL purports to provide "safe, moral, and family oriented" filtered Internet access to subscribers for a monthly fee of \$19.95. FOL claims that it will be able to attract thousands of subscribers through its affinity group marketing program, whereby religious or non-profit organizations agree to recommend FOL's filtered Internet service to their members and, in exchange, FOL will pay the referring organization \$5 per month per subscriber.
- 9. Thurman manages FOL's day-to-day affairs, communicates with investors and prospective investors, and negotiates the Company's contracts. During the relevant period, Thurman provided copies of FOL's fraudulent offering materials and other information to sales agents who sold FOL's securities in two private placement offerings. Thurman also directly made offers and sales of FOL securities to prospective investors and investors. Thurman has signature authority over all of FOL's bank accounts.
- 10. Fiene serves as FOL's chief operating officer and also has signature authority over all of FOL's bank accounts. Fiene participated in FOL's marketing activities, having written at least one letter to shareholders describing FOL's purported marketing strategies and efforts.

B. FOL's Two Securities Offerings

11. Between July 1999 and December 2000, FOL raised \$3.9 million from approximately 410 investors nationwide through two nearly identical private placement offerings. FOL offered and sold its securities primarily to self-identified fundamentalist Christians. FOL told investors in each offering that the minimum investment was \$5,000, but some investors purchased fractional units. Although the prospectus for each offering indicates

that the investment is "strictly limited to accredited investors," many investors are not accredited investors and had so indicated on their subscription agreements.

- 12. FOL's first private placement offering took place primarily between July 1999 and August 2000. Defendants offered to the general public 1000 "units" consisting of 2000 shares of FOL common stock and warrants at a price of \$5,000 per unit, for a total offering of \$5 million ("Series A Offering"). The Series A offering was not fully subscribed, and FOL raised only approximately \$3,525,000 dollars through the Series A offering.
- 13. In September 2000, FOL began offering and selling an additional 400 units at a price of \$5,000 per unit, for a total offering of \$2 million ("Series B Offering"). The Series B units consisted of 20,000 shares of FOL common stock and no warrants. FOL raised only approximately \$375,000 through the Series B offering. FOL appears to have ceased raising investor funds around December 2000.

C. <u>Material Misrepresentations And Omissions</u>

14. Defendants provided prospective and existing investors with fraudulent offering materials that included a business plan, a prospectus, and a two-page subscription agreement. In addition, many investors received a copy of a purported letter to Thurman from the President of Trinity Broadcasting Network ("TBN"), a television network aimed at fundamentalist Christians, describing TBN's commitment to help build FOL's subscriber base. Finally, approximately once a month, FOL sent letters (authored by Thurman) to existing shareholders that contained information about the Company and encouraged shareholders to buy additional FOL securities. These documents were replete with material misrepresentations and omissions and, in the case of the TBN commitment, the letter was a complete fabrication.

(i) Projected Revenues and Anticipated Returns

- 15. The prospectus and business plan distributed to prospective investors in connection with FOL's Series A offering projected that an "ultra conservative proforma indicates a first year customer base in excess of 2.5 million subscribers which will realize in excess of \$330 million dollars in revenue." FOL claimed that it would earn in excess of \$120 million in net profits in its first year of operation, and that its "accumulated five year earnings" would exceed \$1 billion. FOL's Series B offering materials, prepared and disseminated a year later, contain identical projections.
- 16. FOL had no basis for its claimed projected subscriber base, revenues and anticipated returns. FOL's records demonstrate that its subscriber base never exceeded 150 users. Moreover, as explained below, it never had any commitment from TBN to supply it with subscribers. Certainly by the time the Series B offering materials were disseminated, Defendants knew or recklessly disregarded that FOL had not met or even remotely approached the projections outlined in the Series A offering materials.

(ii) The Forged TBN Letter Used to Solicit Investors

17. Defendants solicited investments by sending investors and prospective investors a copy of a letter dated August 27, 1999, purportedly written to FOL and Thurman by Paul F. Crouch ("Crouch"), the head of TBN. The TBN letter stressed TBN's commitment to help FOL build its subscriber base. According to the letter, TBN had over 322,000 "signed requests with credit card numbers [of individuals] who are willing to make the switch [to FOL] as soon as the [FOL] service is available." The TBN letter further stated that "[w]e have no doubt of fulfilling our commitment of three million subscribers by year end."

- 18. Thurman encouraged FOL's sales agents to show the TBN letter to prospective investors. Accordingly, when soliciting prospective investors, FOL's sales agents emphasized the Company's purported affiliation with TBN and TBN's commitment to help FOL build its subscriber base. Thurman also periodically mentioned FOL's affiliation with TBN in his monthly letters to FOL investors and in conversations with them.
- 19. The TBN letter was a complete fabrication distributed by Defendants to fraudulently induce prospective and existing investors into purchasing shares of FOL. Crouch's signature on the TBN letter was a complete forgery and the representations therein were false.

(iii) FOL Falsely Claimed to Be Preparing for an IPO

- 20. From the very beginning of FOL's securities offerings, Thurman repeatedly told investors that the Company would eventually engage in an IPO. Starting in mid-February 2000, Thurman began to represent in his monthly letter to investors that FOL had selected Dean Witter as the lead underwriter for its IPO. Thurman also told investors they could sell up to 50% of their FOL shares at the purported \$158.50 per share offering price, and encouraged them to buy additional FOL securities in the Company's private placement offerings. Many new and existing investors purchased FOL's securities so that they could participate in the purportedly imminent IPO.
- 21. In late February 2000, Thurman and Fiene held a shareholders' meeting to discuss FOL's IPO. At the meeting, they explained Dean Witter's role in the offering, and gave shareholders copies of a draft prospectus purportedly prepared by Dean Witter. Fiene told shareholders that his uncle was a Dean Witter vice president who had agreed to assist FOL in its offering. Later, in a March 2000 letter to shareholders, Thurman said that FOL had filed applications with the Commission for an IPO, and was awaiting Commission approval. In a June

- 21, 2000 update, Thurman told investors that "[w]e received word this morning that our application with the SEC for our IPO has been conditionally approved....We will have final approval within 10 days."
- 22. These representations were outright lies. Dean Witter never offered to underwrite FOL's offering, and never prepared a draft prospectus. Similarly, FOL had never made any filings with the Commission.

(iv) Failure to Disclose the Criminal Histories of Thurman and Fiene

- 23. The FOL offering materials misleadingly tout the background and experience of FOL's "co-founders," Thurman and Fiene. The offering materials describe Thurman as having a professional background in "banking, accounting, and finance related matters" combined with "proven marketing and management abilities." Thurman's resume, included in FOL's business plan, also touted Thurman as a religious leader and author. With respect to Fiene, the offering materials describe Fiene's professional background as including "construction, management, and mortgage brokering" and claim that Fiene has "extensive marketing skills."
- 24. The offering materials fail to disclose, however, that Thurman and Fiene are convicted felons. Thurman's numerous criminal convictions include wire fraud, possession of a forged instrument, theft of services, grand theft, and a recent conviction for grand theft in July 2000. Fiene was convicted of burglary in 1991 and armed robbery and grand theft in 1995.

 None of these convictions were disclosed in the offering materials or other information provided to prospective and existing investors.

D. Misappropriation of Investor Funds by the Individual Defendants

25. Thurman and Fiene have misappropriated at least \$1.8 million in investor funds for their own use. In addition to generous checks written to themselves and other withdrawals

made on FOL's account, they have used investor funds to pay their household and living expenses, purchase expensive toys, extravagant vacations and other luxury items. For example, Thurman and Fiene purchased a BMW automobile, a custom motorcycle, jewelry, and merchandise from adult novelty and drug paraphernalia stores.

COUNT I

SALES OF UNREGISTERED SECURITIES IN VIOLATION OF SECTIONS 5(a) AND 5(c) OF THE SECURITIES ACT

- 26. The Commission repeats and realleges its allegations set forth at paragraphs 1 through 25 of this Complaint as if fully restated herein.
- 27. No registration statement was filed or in effect with the Commission pursuant to the Securities Act with respect to the securities and transactions described herein.
- 28. Since at least July 1999 through December 2000, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene, directly or indirectly, have:
 - (a) made use of the means or instruments of transportation or communication in interstate commerce or of the mails to sell securities as described herein,
 through the use or medium of a prospectus or otherwise;
 - (b) carried securities or caused such securities, as described herein, to be carried through the mails or in interstate commerce, by any means or instruments of transportation, for the purpose of sale or delivery after sale; and/or
 - (c) made use of the means or instruments of transportation or communication in interstate commerce or of the mails to offer to sell or offer to buy through the use or medium of any prospectus or otherwise, as described herein,

without a registration statement having been filed or being in effect with the Commission as to such securities.

29. By reason of the foregoing, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene have violated, and unless enjoined, will continue to violate Sections 5(a) and 5(c) of the Securities Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 77e(a) and 77e(c).

COUNT II

FRAUD IN THE OFFER OR SALE OF SECURITIES IN VIOLATION OF SECTION 17(a)(1) OF THE SECURITIES ACT

- 30. The Commission repeats and realleges its allegations set forth at paragraphs 1 through 25 of this Complaint as if fully restated herein.
- 31. Since at least July 1999 through December 2000, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene, directly or indirectly, in the offer or sale of securities, by use of the means or instruments of transportation or communication in interstate commerce or by use of the mails, as described herein, have knowingly, willfully or recklessly employed devices, schemes or artifices to defraud.
- 32. By reason of the foregoing, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene have violated and, unless enjoined, will continue to violate Section 17(a)(1) of the Securities Act, 15 U.S.C. § 77q(a)(1).

COUNT III

FRAUD IN CONNECTION WITH THE PURCHASE OR SALE OF SECURITIES IN VIOLATION OF SECTION 10(b) OF THE EXCHANGE ACT AND RULE 10b-5

- 33. The Commission repeats and realleges its allegations set forth at paragraphs 1 through 25 of this Complaint as if fully restated herein.
- 34. Since at least July 1999 through December 2000, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene, directly or indirectly, by use of the means or instrumentalities of interstate commerce or of the mails, or of any facility of any national exchange, in connection with the purchase or sale of securities, as described herein, have knowingly, willfully or recklessly:
 - (a) employed devices, schemes or artifices to defraud;
 - (b) made untrue statements of material facts and omitted to state material facts necessary in order to make the statements made, in the light of the circumstances under which they were made, not misleading; and/or
 - (c) engaged in acts, practices and courses of business which have operated, are now operating and will operate as a fraud upon the purchasers of such securities.
- 35. By reason of the foregoing, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene have violated and, unless enjoined, will continue to violate Section 10(b) of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. § 78j(b), and Rule 10b-5, 17 C.F.R. § 240. 10b-5, thereunder.

COUNT IV

FRAUD IN VIOLATION OF SECTIONS 17(a)(2) AND 17(a)(3) OF THE SECURITIES ACT

- 36. The Commission repeats and realleges its allegations set forth at paragraphs 1 through 25 of this Complaint as if fully restated herein.
- 37. Since at least July 1999 through December 2000, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene, directly or indirectly, in the offer or sale of securities, by use of the means or instruments of transportation or communication in interstate commerce or by the use of the mails, as described herein, have:
 - (a) obtained money or property by means of untrue statements of material facts and omissions to state material facts necessary to make the statements made, in the light of the circumstances under which they were made, not misleading; and/or
 - (b) engaged in transactions, practices and courses of business which are now operating and will operate as a fraud or deceit upon purchasers and prospective purchasers of such securities.
- 38. By reason of the foregoing, Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene have violated and, unless enjoined, will continue to violate Sections 17(a)(2) and 17(a)(3) of the Securities Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 77(q)(a)(2) and 77(q)(a)(3).

RELIEF REQUESTED

WHEREFORE, the Commission respectfully requests that the Court:

I.

Declaratory Relief

Declare, determine and find that Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene committed the violations of the federal securities laws alleged herein.

II.

Permanent Injunctive Relief

Issue a Permanent Injunction, restraining and enjoining:

Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene, their officers, agents, servants, employees, attorneys, and all persons in active concert or participation with them, and each of them, from violating: (a) Sections 5(a) and 5(c) of the Securities Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 77e(a) and 77e(c); (b) Section 17(a)(1) of the Securities Act, 15 U.S.C. § 77q(a); (c) Section 10(b) of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. § 78j(b), and Rule 10b-5, 17 C.F.R. § 240.10b-5, thereunder; and (d) Sections 17(a)(2) and 17(a)(3) of the Securities Act, 15 U.S.C. §§ 77(q)(a)(2) and 77(q)(a)(3).

III.

Disgorgement

Issue an Order requiring Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene, jointly and severally, to disgorge all ill-gotten profits or proceeds that they have received as a result of the acts and/or courses of conduct complained of herein, with prejudgment interest.

IV.

Penalties

Issue an Order directing Defendants FOL, Thurman, and Fiene to pay civil money penalties pursuant to Section 20(d) of the Securities Act, 15 U.S.C. § 77t(d), and Section 21(d) of the Exchange Act, 15 U.S.C. § 78(d)(3).

V.

Asset Freeze

Issue an Order temporarily freezing the assets of Defendants FOL, Thurman and Fiene until further Order of the Court.

VI.

Accounting

Issue an Order requiring accountings from Defendants FOL, Thurman and Fiene.

VII.

Further Relief

Grant such other and further relief as may be necessary and appropriate.

VIII.

Retention of Jurisdiction

Further, the Commission respectfully requests that the Court retain jurisdiction over this action in order to implement and carry out the terms of all orders and decrees that may hereby be

entered, or to entertain any suitable application or motion by the Commission for additional relief within the jurisdiction of this Court.

Dated: March 9, 2001

Respectfully submitted,

By:

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Senior Trial Counsel
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I. (a) PLAINTIFFS			DEFENDANTS		
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☐ 110 Insurance ☐ 120 Marine	PERSONAL INJURY 310 Airplane	PERSONAL INJURY 362 Personal Injury –	B 610 Agriculture B 620 Other Food & Drug	☐ 422 Appeal 28 USC 158	☐ 400 State Reapportionment ☐ 410 Antitrust
130 Miller Act	315 Airplane Product Liability	Med Malpractice 365 Personal Injury	B 625 Drug Related Seizure of Property 21 USC 881	☐ 423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157	☐ 430 Banks and Banking B☐ 450 Commerce/ICC Rates/etc
☐ 150 Recovery of Overpayment & Enforcement of Judgment	320 Assault Libel & Slander	Product Liability 368 Asbestos Personal	B 630 Liquor Laws B 640 R R & Truck	A PROPERTY RIGHTS	☐ 460 Deportation ☐ 470 Racketeer influenced and
☐ 151 Medicare Act	330 Federal Employers	Injury Product Liability	B 650 Airline Regs	☐ 820 Copyrights	Corrupt Organizations
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A REAL PROPERTY	A CIVIL RIGHTS	PRISONER PETITIONS	☐ 720 Labor Mgmt Relations	☐ 863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g)) ☐ 864 SSID Title XVI	□ 894 Energy Allocation Act □ 895 Freedom of
□ 210 Land Condemnation	☐ 441 Voting	B ☐ 510 Motions to Vacate	☐ 730 Labor/Mgmt Reporting & Disclosure Act	□ 865 RSI (405(g))	Information Act
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240 Torts to Land 245 Tort Product Liability	Accommodations 444 Welfare	8 530 General A 535 Death Penalty	790 Other Labor Litigation	A 870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff	State Statutes
290 All Other Real Property	440 Other Civil Rights	B 540 Mandamus & Other B 550 Civil Rights B 555 Prison Condition	A□ 791 Empl Ret Inc Security Act	or Defendant) A 871 IRS Third Party 26 USC 7609	☐ 890 Other Statutory Actions A OR B
VI. CAUSE OF ACTIO 77q(a)(1); 15 U.S Violations of the LENGTH OF TRIAL via 2 days estimated (for both sides	DO NOT CITE JURISDIC: 5.C. § 78j(b); federal secur	TIONAL STATUTES UNLESS DIVE 17 C.F.R. \$240.	FILING AND WRITE BRIEF STATEME RSITY) 15 USC 55 10b-5; 15 U.S.C.	NT OF CAUSE 77e (a) (a) (2)	(c) and 17 (q) (a) (3).
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