

ASPHALT DRIVEWAYS AND SCAMMERS

For anyone living in the country, a paved or black-topped driveway is a pretty nice improvement. It makes moving snow around easier, eliminates the need to use the Roundup to kill the grass and weeds which take over if allowed to, and just generally keeps the place cleaner and tidier. But having such a nice driveway can also put a target up for scammers. The need for periodic sealing of asphalt driveways or other driveway improvements provides a business opportunity for hard-working folks who don't mind hot and dirty work. But, it also creates an opportunity for scammers. Almost every year, Clinton County is visited by itinerant paving scammers. These types show up out of nowhere, promise to do a top-quality job, and then just slop on some thin coat of oil, and demand a king's ransom in payment.

This month, I've talked to two people scammed by these crooks. Their stories offer some lessons for anyone with a driveway.

Harold lives near Low Moor. His place boasts a long, wide asphalt driveway. Every few years, some local folks come around and seal it for Harold, charging a few hundred dollars. Several weeks ago, Harold was in the backyard, working on the lawn. A young man in a big dually pickup truck pulled into the driveway, and offered Harold a "hell of a deal" on sealing the driveway. He promised six coats of sealer, for \$5000. The man gave Harold a receipt, which named his company as G-N-C Construction of Houston, Texas. He and a teen-ager proceeded to splash on some oil product for twenty minutes, covering a small area. Then the scammer said he needed to leave to check on his partner. He never came back. Now Harold is out \$5000, and has tar splashed all over his garage door, and basement windows.

Here is the second story. Eugene lives in the Calamus area. He's got a gravel driveway. Early in July, a man calling himself Mark showed up in a big pickup truck. He said he worked for a chip and seal outfit, working "just down the road". Mark claimed "the truck broke down" and he needed to off-load the cargo to make repairs. He promised to chip and seal a small portion of the driveway "at no charge" just to get the load off. If Eugene liked it, Mark would do the entire driveway, and it would be "better than concrete".

Let me explain about chip and seal. If it is done properly, the contractor spreads a coat of hot oil, maybe $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, then overlays that with

small crushed rock, and rolls over the whole thing. It's not an asphalt driveway, but it's still pretty good. So, Eugene agreed to this "sample". Two hours later, six men and three pieces of heavy equipment showed up with Mark. Mark attached himself to Eugene and his wife while the crew worked. Mark kept up non-stop conversation and walked all throughout the acreage while the work went on. Eugene said he felt "distracted", not able to take in what happened. Then another man joined them, Dave. Dave presented a bill for \$3800. Dave pressured Eugene to pay, and finally Eugene paid \$2700 for the job. He wrote a check. What he got was a thin layer of chipped rock, with a veneer of oil. Today, grass is growing through it.

What are the lessons here?

1. Anyone coming to your door wanting to sell you something in Clinton County needs a county-issued permit. Every city and town in the county has the same requirement. No permit? You should start suspecting a scam.
2. Such door to door solicitors are required by state law to maintain a trade name. Such name, with an address and phone number should appear on any contract. Without an address, how are you ever going to track down the salesperson if something goes wrong?
3. Any door to door solicitor, who sells you a service or product, must provide you with a written contract, which spells out your right to cancel the contract. And in a separate document, called a notice of cancellation, they must again provide notice of your right to cancel the contract within three business days. Demand these documents before any sale. If the salesperson can't produce them, you should suspect a scam, and tell the sales people to leave.
4. You should resist doing business with anyone who tells you they have "leftover" asphalt, and need to get rid of it. This kind of talk is always a fraud.

RECALL NOTICE OR SALES PITCH?

Thanks to Alan Green, my predecessor at Seniors vs. Crime, for detecting a car warranty sales pitch disguised as a recall notice. Several companies offer extended automobile warranties. Likely many of you received postcards identifying your car and pointing out the manufacturer's warranty is expired or due to expire. Alan received a postcard which, at first glance, looked like a recall notice. It is titled as a "technical service bulletin". As Alan pointed

out, it practically requires a magnifying glass to read the small print which tells us it is just another sales pitch, or junk mail. If you are in the market for such a warranty, go ahead and check it out, but don't get rushed or panicked into calling because it looks like something it is not.

CAR FIT CLASSES

Another Car Fit session is scheduled for August 6th, from 10 am to 2 pm, at the Church of the Open Door in Clinton, located at 816 13th Ave North. These Car Fit sessions are designed to make sure you "fit your car". A team of workers will evaluate you in your car seat, looking to see how your seated position is relative to your mirrors, seatbelt, steering wheel, and floor pedals. The team makes suggestions to enhance your driving ability by adjusting controls, or your position. They also demonstrate some pretty interesting devices you can easily install, with the goal of making driving easier and safer.

To attend, you need to schedule a time, by calling 563-421-1480, or you can register online by visiting www.carfit.org .

CONTACT SENIORS VS.CRIME

Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you. Contact me at Seniors vs. Crime, Clinton County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211 extension 4433, or email me at randymeier@gapa911.us

End of column /rmeier