

SEVEN VICTIMS LOSE \$24,000 TO LOCAL SCAMMER

The August 13, 2016 edition of the Clinton Herald reported in detail about the sentencing of Shawn Kennedy, age 50, of Clinton, for swindling over \$24,000 from seven Clinton area men and women. Kennedy pleaded guilty. The court sentenced her to a suspended ten year term in prison. As a condition of the suspended sentence, Kennedy must complete an in-patient drug treatment program, and make restitution to the victims.

I write all the time about faraway crooks trying to cheat us through the phone, the internet, or social media. But this was an example of a good old-fashioned, right in your face, con job. This came to my attention when a 79 year old widow and a younger family acquaintance came to see me, to report how Shawn Kennedy tricked them into giving Kennedy thousands of dollars. I learned of more victims, and contacted them. Other victims came forward on their own. We treated this as a criminal matter. A Clinton Police Department detective helped me out a great deal by pulling out old text messages from the phones of victims. This information allowed us to get evidence from Kennedy's own text messages on her phone. We got these messages by serving a search warrant on Kennedy's phone service provider for the text records. Those records confirmed everything the victims told me.

Kennedy took advantage of people she knew. She cheated family acquaintances, or she cheated customers or fellow workers she knew through her work as a waitress. Her ploy was to hit up these acquaintances or customers for small sums of money - \$75, \$100, or \$150. She claimed she needed the money to secure a 401k distribution, or to get an inheritance finalized, always promising to re-pay several times what was owed when the distribution or inheritance came in. And if you gave her the money, she came back for more - over and over and over, day after day. Over a few months, it added up to a lot of money.

Of course, there was no 401k, or any inheritance. Where did the money go? For crack cocaine. Kennedy admitted in court she suffered from drug addiction, acknowledging that's where the money went. She took responsibility for her actions and expressed deep remorse.

Here's a couple of things I want to bring out of this sad story. First, it's not just strangers who can fleece you. Second, if you think you've been cheated, report it. You might believe no one can help you, or your loss was insignificant and not worth reporting. But your experience might tie into the experience of other victims you don't know about, making it a better case to investigate and perhaps prosecute.

OTHER SCAMS

I received another complaint of someone falling for the "government grant scam", involving the purchase of iTunes cards. This scam works by a caller claiming to work for the "US Government

Grant Dept” offering the victim a \$9600 grant. To claim the grant, the victim needs to pay a \$250 fee. Most recently, the scammers demand the victim pay the fee by purchasing iTunes reloadable debit cards, then giving the caller the card’s serial number. With that number, the caller can shift the money off the card account somewhere else.

If anyone calls you and tells you to pay for something using a reloadable debit card, such as iTunes, MyVanilla, Blue, etc, it will be a scam. Once you give away the serial number of those cards, you lose control of the money, and you won’t get it back.

NEWS FROM OTHER COURTS

The Federal Trade Commission and the State of Florida announced a settlement on June 20, 2016, involving two phony companies run out of Florida who bilked thousands of folks of millions of dollars in tech support scams. The complaint reads these crooks “used software designed to trick consumers into thinking there were problems with their computer, and directed consumers to telemarketers who subjected these consumers to high-pressure deceptive sales pitches for tech support...”

This seems to be a lucrative scam, as this settlement orders the two companies, OMG Tech Help and Vast Tech Support, and their CEO to pay \$36 million.

As I wrote this column, I received a call from a Camanche man whose computer locked up, displayed an 888 number, directing him to call that number within five minutes to correct the problem, or risk losing everything stored on his computer. Instead, the Camanche man called me. What he reported sounds exactly like what OMG and Vast Tech Support did.

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