

## HISTORY OF A SCAM

This is a short history lesson, which illustrates that crooked tricks and scheming have been around a long time. In the 1500's, over 200 years before our first Fourth of July, a scam called the Spanish Prisoner fraud conned unsuspecting Europeans. Scammers approached their victim, telling them a wealthy distant relative was falsely imprisoned in Spain, and needed a small ransom to get released. The scammers promised a fabulous reward if the victim only paid this pretty small ransom. The victim pays the ransom, but another obstacle arises, requiring more money to overcome. This goes on as long as the victim has money. It was a fraud then, and the same fraud happens today...just the details change. The basic premise – make someone believe a large reward awaits them in exchange for a small sum up front-continues to work, even after five centuries. I know this because it just worked in Clinton last week.

Now the modern day version of this scam is dressed up with features of modern life, including social media, cell phones, and wiring money. This how it happened...A woman from Whiteside County, Illinois, let's call her Leigh, received a Facebook message from her cousin. Leigh's cousin reported she got a message that Leigh won a big lottery of \$70,000 from Facebook. Soon enough, Leigh started to receive text messages telling her the same thing. When Leigh replied and asked for details, she learned she needed to send a small amount of money, \$370, to verify her identity, sending it through Moneygram. She did. And she got more messages, telling her of more problems, requiring Leigh send more money. To keep Leigh interested, the crooks sent her photo images displaying a cashier's check written to her for \$100,000. At one point, Leigh received a message telling her the UPS truck carrying her money got stopped for speeding, and the driver needed money to pay the ticket to continue with his delivery.

Unfortunately, this continued until Leigh put up over \$1300, and sent money six times via Moneygram, to Nigeria. It stopped when an alert Western Union agent sent her to me. Leigh found out someone hacked her cousin's Facebook account, and an imposter sent the original message.

A couple of lessons, in addition to the history lesson, need reviewed:

- Never pay money to claim a prize

- Never send money by Moneygram or Western Union, unless you came up with the idea to send it.
- Never send money out of the US – it is ALWAYS a scam

We need to talk to each other, and warn others about these scams. I can't do this by myself. If you get a hint someone you know is sending money somewhere, talk to them about it, or call me, and I will see what I can do.

### **SAFE DRIVING COURSE – TRY THIS PHONE NUMBER**

I know of at least two people who want to participate in the Safe Driving Course scheduled for September 15, 2015, because two people called me to tell me when they tried to call to sign up, they reached a sales firm, not the Eastern Iowa Community College District. The college gave me the wrong phone number, which I published. I apologize for the error. The correct number to call is:

800-850-5440

The college furnished me with an alternate toll-free number, 888-336-3907. You should be able to register at either number. This course is offered at the Clinton Technology Center at 1951 Manufacturing Drive in Clinton. When you call, ask about course numbers 158604 or 158606. Lunch is included with the course.

### **CAR FIT COMES BACK TO CLINTON**

The Iowa Dept of Transportation (DOT) informed me they scheduled another Car Fit session for August 6<sup>th</sup>, from 10 am to 2 pm, at the Church of the Open Door in Clinton, located at 816 13<sup>th</sup> Ave North. These Car Fit sessions are designed to make sure you "fit your car". The program is a collaboration of AARP, the American Occupational Therapy Association, and AAA, as well as the DOT. 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.

We did a session last summer, and found it very popular. To attend, you need to schedule a time, by calling 563-421-1480, or you can register online by visiting [www.carfit.org](http://www.carfit.org) .

### **NEWS FROM THE COURTS**

People ask me all the time, "Do you ever catch these crooks?" So I like to keep you informed when I learn of some action against scammers. This is the latest.

On July 6, 2015, the Federal Trade Commission and the Florida Attorney General filed suit in US District Court in the Northern District of Illinois against a New York-based operation, Lifewatch for "using blatantly illegal and deceptive robocalls to trick older consumers throughout the US and Canada."

About a year ago, many, many people reported to me, phone calls from "John from the shipping department", want to make arrangements to send a free medical alert device. Those who bit into this were lied to. If you received the "free medical alert system", you needed to furnish a credit card number, and this got billed for monthly monitoring fees of \$29.95 to \$39.95. Well, "John from the shipping department" worked for Lifewatch.

These calls broke a bunch of laws, and the suit seeks an injunction against Lifewatch, and their money to make restitution. I'm interested to see how this turns out.

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](mailto:randymeier@gapa911.us)

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