

FAKE JURY DUTY SCAM COSTS DEWITT WOMAN

The Scott County Sheriff's Office posted a warning on their website on July 26, 2017, alerting the public of scammers posing as officials of the sheriff's office, calling area residents, informing them of a warrant for their arrest, which can be paid using prepaid debit cards. Unfortunately, this was a day late to help out a Dewitt woman who received such a call, and fell for it.

The Dewitt woman, I'll call her Peggy, lost \$1750 in this scam. Peggy came home from work on July 25th, and found a message on her answering machine, telling her to call the Scott County Sheriff's Office right away. The caller left a number with a 563 area code. Now Peggy admits she made a mistake right away, and called this number back, instead of verifying the real phone number for the sheriff's office. So she called as instructed, and heard a message which sounded like she reached the sheriff's office, but no one was in. She tried the next day and got through to a Steve Harris, who said he worked for the sheriff. He told her she missed a summons for federal jury duty, and needed to post a bond and appear in Scott County. He told her the bond needed to get loaded on Green Dot Moneypaks. Peggy told me, "it all sounded very real and believable to me," so she left work, went to her bank, withdrew cash, and drove to HyVee in Clinton to buy the Green Dot Moneypaks. These are just one of the many prepaid debit cards available for purchase at lots of retail outlets. She bought the cards and got them loaded, then called her sheriff contact back. He asked her to photograph the reverse side of the cards, which shows the serial number, and photograph her drivers license. She did all this, and sent him the photographic images via text message on her smartphone.

The scammer told Peggy to go to the Clinton County Courthouse and meet a deputy there. She went, and waited. And waited. Going more worried all the time, she finally hailed one of the last people leaving the courthouse, who turned out to be County Attorney Mike Wolf. Probably one of the best people she could talk to in this situation. Peggy explained her dilemma, and got the bad news from Mr. Wolf, she got scammed.

Peggy admits she missed a lot of red flags. She offered some advice for anyone getting such a phone call. Verify the caller is legitimate. Don't rely on the number the caller gives you. Do your own research and call the real number you get from a public source.

That's good advice, and I will add some tips of my own:

- Lots and lots of scams get victims to buy and load prepaid debit cards, and then reveal the numbers to the scammer. You need to realize this. Pay attention to the scam warnings the card companies make. In this case, the printed numbers on the back of the card were surrounded with a bright red message, telling the user not to reveal the number to anyone they don't know or trust.

- It's not uncommon for crooks to call and impersonate law enforcement. But the real police don't call demanding money. And they don't collect money for fines. Fines can only be paid to the clerk of court, by mail, or in person.
- The "missed jury duty" scam is an old one. Just realize that is handled by clerks of court. If you do miss such a notice, you'll get notified through the clerk of court.

SPOOFED PHONE CALLS

In the last week, I received several complaints from folks telling me they got phone calls from people asking why someone called them from their number. One Clinton woman reported seven different people called her, asking why she called them. Well, she didn't call anyone. Some telemarketing crooks "spoofed" her number, using an electronic trick to making the Clinton woman's phone number and name show up on Caller ID. Telemarketers do this to cover their tracks, and make those on the receiving end of such calls more likely to answer, if they see the call came from a local number. This is nothing new really, but seems to be more and more common. I heard the new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in a radio interview, report this is the most common complaint the FCC receives.

You can file a complaint with the FCC, or me, but as for prevention, there's nothing I know of that can prevent it from happening to you.

GRANDPARENT SCAM

This scam continues to snare our elderly. A Wheatland woman reported losing \$4000 last week. Same old story. A caller posed as her grandson. He needed \$4000 to get out of jail in New York City. She needed to pay it with prepaid debit cards, in this case from Best Buy. The scam worked.

In spite of lots of publicity over many years on this scam, the victim said she never heard of it before. So keep talking about it with everyone you know who might get such a call.

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

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