

Recent 'grandma scam' nearly claims cash from county victim

Written by Marty Randall

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An elderly woman in Austin nearly fell victim to a recent telephone scam.

Only doubts expressed by a local grocery store clerk prevented the scheme from being successful, Austin police later learned.

Whoever tried to perpetrate the alleged crime had the victim's name, cell phone number and home phone number. The caller posed as the woman's grandson, spinning her a tale of having attended a wedding in Canada and gotten into a car crash. The "grandson" said he needed her to wire him \$3,200 to cover a portion of the damage. The man even told her that his voice sounded "different" because the crash caused his airbag to inflate and broke his nose.

The caller instructed his intended victim to wire the money to a woman in Spain because of the "international" aspects of the accident.

The woman traveled to her local bank and got the money as requested and then went to a local grocery store to have the money wired. There, she was helped by a sympathetic store clerk who, upon learning the woman's story, advised her to call the grandson to verify the need for money.

When the woman did so, she learned that the grandson had not been in Canada nor had an accident.

Oddly enough, the would-be scammer called the woman later that same day to see if she had sent the money as instructed. When she demanded his real name, the caller hung up. A check of her cellphone indicated that his phone number was blocked and unobtainable.

It could be that the scammer was someone who knew the woman's grandson and knew how to get her contact numbers, surmised Major/Detective Lonnie Noble of the Austin Police Department. "We may never know for sure how he operated the scam, but we are very thankful that this lady listened to the store clerk and verified the story with her relative," he stated.

He recommended that whenever someone is contacted by either e-mail or telephone about winning a cash prize or given a story about a relative needing money, that person should try to verify the story as soon as possible.

"No one should ever give out personal information, like your social security number or your bank account number over the phone or on the Internet. These people are clever and can think of many ways to part you from your cash. This scam was unusual in that the scammer apparently had gotten this lady's contact numbers and represented himself to be a close relative. People, particularly senior citizens, need to do their research before promising or sending money to anyone," advised Det. Noble.

He commended the grocery store personnel for being diligent and taking an interest in their customers. "That's one of the best reasons for living in a small community," Det. Noble said.

In another scam making the rounds, people are called and advised they have won a lottery or contest where money is demanded of them in advance of receiving their "prize." Legitimate companies and lotteries do not notify winners and then ask them to send money, the detective said.

"The old saying is true that you don't get something for nothing," he noted.

Any time there may be a question about a telephoned offer or prize offering, persons would be wise to check with their local law enforcement agency.

In Scott County, the Sheriff's Department can be reached at 752-8400. The Scottsburg Police Department's telephone number is 752-4462. Austin's police department is reached at 794-4623.

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