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Too good to be true?

Con games and scams

By Gwen R. Rhodes

Momma always said, "If it looks too good to be true, it usually is." But what could be wrong with paying someone to fix your roof after a hurricane? How could it hurt to allow the man at the door claiming to be a plumber to check for water in your basement after the recent flooding? What could be nicer than someone offering to help a parent-in-need buy food and diapers for her baby after losing her home to tropical force winds?

The answer is the same: SAY NO. They are all confidence (con) games or scams and, unfortunately, they are more common than most people might think. Con artists are smart and extremely persuasive. Some will play on your sympathies with stories that tug at your heart; others will play on your vulnerabilities, especially older citizens who live alone.

Two recent scams hitting the Jacksonville area are a new carjacking scheme and a still successful banking scam known as the "Phony Bank Examiner." Con games and bank scams have been around for hundreds of years. People who live in large and small communities alike are victimized every year by extremely convincing and friendly con artists. To avoid swindlers who travel across the country, consumers should ask several questions of any individual who asks them to withdraw money from their bank account.

In the new carjacking scheme, a victim walks to her (or his) parked car, gets in and starts the engine. Looking into the rear window to back out

of the parking space, she notices a piece of paper stuck to the middle of the rear window. The victim puts the car into park and hops out of the car to remove the paper (or whatever it is) that is obstructing her view.

When she reaches the back of the car, the carjackers appear, jump into the car and take off. The engine was running, making it an easy theft. The carjackers get an additional take if it is a woman, as she would have left her purse in the car. This is especially dangerous since a purse contains identification, which includes a home address. You do not want someone getting your home address – they already HAVE your keys.

THE PHONY BANK EXAMINER

Each year, the "Phony Bank Examiner" scam makes its rounds across the country. The scam begins when someone claiming to be a bank examiner or police officer calls a consumer. The victim is asked to help uncover a suspected crime at the bank, such as a teller embezzling money. In some cases, the victim is told to call 911 to verify the caller's identity, but the swindler, not the police, picks up the call. This is done by the con artist not disconnecting from the call or by tapping into the phone service.

The victim is asked to withdraw thousands of dollars in cash and turn it over to the caller. They are told the money needs to be withdrawn so an "investigator" can mark the bills and catch the dishonest bank employee. They are instructed not to discuss the transaction with bank employees. The phony investigator also promises

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