

Seniors...

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pitches, telemarketing calls and unsolicited sales pitches made to them over a 30-day period, and they forwarded all their junk mail received over the same time frame to the AG's Office. As a result of the leads prompted by the survey information, the AG was able to bring suit against a number of companies for deceptive trade practices, and a number of cases were referred to the State Attorney for criminal

prosecutions.

The AG's Office

recognized

that senior

citizens were

very willing to

assist law

enforcement in

combating

crimes being

perpetrated

against them,

but first they had to be educated in crime

prevention so they could protect themselves

from becoming victims of consumer fraud, con

games, and other criminal acts.

A crime prevention program to be run by

volunteers and designed with Florida's senior

population in mind - the Seniors vs. Crime

Project - would offer crime prevention seminars

to Florida's elderly and provide comprehensive training for law enforcement officers and other criminal justice practitioners in understanding how the aging population impacts their roles.

The Project was initially active in five East Coast counties with approximately 300 volunteers. As law enforcement became more involved in crimes involving seniors, the Project began to make more use of its senior

volunteers

(now called

Senior

Sleuths) who

acted as the

eyes and ears

of the AG's

Office by

reporting on

scams and

conducting

surveys as

requested.

Examples

of work performed by Senior Sleuths range

from checking on scanner prices at

supermarkets and counting pills when picking

up prescription medications to more recently

performing undercover stings that captured

salespeople using high pressure sales

techniques and engaging in false and deceptive

practices.

With Florida's explosive growth and the increase in age of our state's population have come criminal behavior directed against our senior citizens. Perhaps even more important than the raw numbers is the psychological and emotional impact of crime on our older citizens.... As we educate law enforcement, social services, judiciary, and other elements of our society, it is critical that we also educate our senior citizens. - Attorney General Bob Butterworth

¹ The homeowner found that police might have judged the matter criminal (which is all they handle) if the con man had never performed any of the work promised, or if there had been no contract. Fourteen similar cases had been filed with the local Seniors Vs. Crime Office. In two cases he failed to cut any grass and just took the money; which made them criminal. On the strength of those two cases and the other 12 that showed his intent, all cases were accepted by the SAO. The landscaper was tried, found guilty and forced to make restitution to all, which he did on a payment plan.

² <http://seniorsvscrime.com/history.htm>, Don Ravenna, Executive Director of Seniors vs. Crime Project

Offices throughout the state

The state's first Seniors vs. Crime office, staffed by Senior Sleuths, was opened in Delray Beach in 2001 as a pilot project to assess the need for a walk-in facility where seniors could talk to a peer if they felt a business or individual had economically victimized them. The office concept proved to be a resounding success, returning in excess of \$1 million to seniors in a little over one year of operation. In addition, Senior Sleuths uncovered a travel scam that victimized dozens of seniors. Based on their investigation of senior complaints, criminal charges were filed against the travel company and state regulators closed down the company.

Based on this outstanding success, offices have been opened throughout the state manned by more than 300 Senior Sleuths, with new ones being added to the roster monthly, and new ways to get volunteers involved in assisting

other seniors are being explored. Offices will continue to emerge as a positive means to help seniors combat fraud, high-pressure sales tactics, deceptive advertising and outright criminal conduct.²

Seniors vs. Crime is partnering with police and Sheriff's departments in many counties to provide seniors with direct help that was previously unavailable to most citizens. Local offices are in two JSO substations: Zone 2 in Regency Mall, and Zone 6 in Highland Square on Dunn Avenue. David Blacklock is Regional Director of this area - Region 3.

Bob and Trish Edwards, long-time supporters of the Justice Coalition who faithfully deliver our papers to the Southside, are Senior Sleuths who wish they could have had this resource when they were scammed several years ago. They urge our readers to take advantage of this organization and spread the word.

www.justicecoalition.org

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Bill McCollum Attorney General

Seniors vs Crime

A Special Project of the Florida Attorney General

Region 3 2009 Case Synopses

Different Rents for Different Renters

The client in Jacksonville Highlands community was paying more rent for her apartment than similarly situated renters. Resolution: Through contact with the involved parties, the situation was resolved. Recovery: Client was saved \$802.40.

Threatened Issuance of Lien

Client (Highlands) had new roofing installed. He paid the contractor for labor and materials (shingles). The roofing contractor did not pay his supplier; therefore, the supplier - through their check processing company - threatened a lien against our client's home; which appeared to be legal. We found that the supplier, contractor and check processing company had partnered on a regular basis. Resolution: Through several conversations with the check processor and supplier, we were able to prevent issuance of the lien. At a point in time, the statute of limitations had expired for filing a lien. Recovery: Client was relieved from paying \$3,000.

Mail Order Contest Winnings

The client (Highlands) received two checks, at separate times, reflecting her winnings in mail order contests. She questioned the validity of both. This was part of a scam to gain access to the client's account information and withdraw the funds for which the client would be held accountable by the bank. Resolution: Through our and the client's contacts with various banks, we found the checks to be part of a scam. The secret word is seniors. Recovery: Client was spared a potential loss of \$5,938.70.

Deceptive Practices

The client (Highlands) accused the gym she joined of using deceptive business practices (age related). They advertised a month-to-month contract, but after she signed up, they charged her bank account for a long-term contract. Resolution: Through contact with the gym and reviewing the contract, we were able to recover the client's funds. Recovery: Client recovered \$452.

Service Not Ordered By Client

The Highlands client's house sitter allowed a relative to order Internet service while she was on a multi-month out-of-town work project. The utility company insisted that she was responsible even though her name and Social Security number were used without her permission. Resolution: Through contact with higher echelon in the utility company, we were able to have the client's charge removed/refunded. Recovery: Client was refunded \$46.16.