

Protecting Yourself from Financial Scams

There have been several stories recently about local residents being scammed over the phone. Illegitimate charities, fraudulent sweepstakes offers, bogus investment schemes and credit card fraud are just a few tactics used to con people out of their money. Because the elderly are more trustworthy and often have a “nest egg”, they are more frequently targets of financial predators. In fact, according to a 2009 report by MetLife, the annual financial loss by victims of elder financial abuse is estimated to be at least \$2.6 billion.

Unfortunately, seniors are less likely to report fraud because they may be confused on who to report the crime to, and may also be too embarrassed at the circumstances. In addition, sometimes it may take weeks or months until seniors find out that they have been scammed, which is often too late to rectify the situation. Compounding the problem is that if you have been taken over the phone, it is difficult to get your money back.

While everyone needs to be aware, senior citizens need to take extra precaution. With that said, the best way to protect yourself, or someone you love, is to prevent the fraud from occurring in the first place. So follow these useful tips (compliments of the NYS Attorney General’s Office) to better defend yourself from financial predators.

- Do not give money or personal information (banking information or social security number) to someone who contacts you on the phone.
- Do not cash checks you receive from sweepstakes that you have not entered, or send money for taxes due. This is a scam that sends you a check that bounces at the bank, and asks you to send your banking information to the scammers.
- Do not carry your Social Security Card with you in your wallet.
- If you want to stop receiving the “Pre-Approved Credit Card Applications” in the mail, you can contact the credit bureaus to find out more about their opt-out procedures by calling (888) 567-8688.
- To opt out of telemarketing calls, you can call (888) 382-1222 from the number you wish to register. You must do this for both your home phone and your cell phone.
- Don’t be afraid to hang up the phone if you are confused or not interested.
- Take your time. Ask for written information before you commit. Your financial commitment may have long-term consequences -- talk with someone you trust about the offer, such as friends and family members.

You have worked hard for your savings but, unfortunately, there are many people who are looking to take it from you. Con artists will play on fears and force quick decisions. By being aware and vigilant, you can take protect yourselves from becoming a victim.