

FRAUD ALERT!

Sweepstakes Mailers

“We are pleased to inform you that a lump sum amount of \$280,000 (Two Hundred and Eighty Thousand US Dollars) has been deposited in our bank as your sweepstakes prize. Enclosed is a check of \$3,250.88 as your initial payment. We strongly advise you to keep this vital information away from the public in order to avoid multiple claims.”

The above is an excerpt from a Final Prize Notification letter purportedly sent from a well known bank that several older adult Quakertown residents received in the mail recently. The mailers directed the “prize recipients” to contact their “claim agent” to receive instruction on how to collect their winnings. The resident is then asked to provide a bank account number, bank routing number as well as their birth date and other personal information. In order to collect their winnings, each winner is also instructed to pay a Non-Residential tax and is advised to pay the tax via Western Union to their “Tax Agent.” Prompting the prize recipient to call for more information or to claim a prize is often a trap to lure people into providing personal information, which then gives the thief all the information they need to take your money.

According to the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General your mailbox is an ideal vehicle for con artists to contact and eventually trick you. The prize notifications often have official looking seals or logos from commonly known banking institutions. If notified that you have won money, you can not be required to pay any money; free means free. Any taxes on winnings are always paid separately to the government.

The same individuals who attempt to trick people into sending money and providing personal and financial information, also know that their targets are becoming wiser. The following is an example of how the con artist attempts to gain the trust of the potential target, *“We wish to remind you that we are not selling any product to you. We are aware of many phony mails out there and hereby reiterate the legitimacy of this notification.”* It’s important to remember that an assertion of legitimacy is nothing more than the con artist’s own self-interest: a desire to obtain your money by using any means possible to achieve this goal.

How can you DETECT a scam? The Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General provides these tell-tale signs:

- **Cash Only:** Cash, money orders or wire transfers should not be required for transactions.
- **Secret Plans:** No one should ask or instruct you not to tell anyone about the transaction..
- **Get Rich Quick:** Any scheme should be carefully investigated.
- **Contests:** Make sure they aren’t a come-on to draw you into a money-losing scheme. If you didn’t enter a lottery or sweepstakes, you can’t WIN a lottery or sweepstakes.
- **Haste:** Be aware of pressure to “act immediately or lose out.”
- **Last Chance:** If it is a chance worth taking, it should not be such short notice that you can not research it.

For more information on the warning signs of this or other kinds of scams, contact The Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General’s Toll free Senior Helpline at 1-866-623-2137 or go to www.attorneygeneral.gov. If you or someone you know was a victim of this or a similar scam, please contact your local police department and report the experience to federal and state authorities.

BUCKS COUNTY CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS TASK FORCE

Bucks County District Attorney’s Office

215-348-6344

Bucks County Area Agency on Aging

215-348-0510

Bucks County Coroner’s Office

215-348-3852

Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA)

1-800-675-6900

A Woman’s Place (AWP)

1-800-220-8116

Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection

215-348-6060

Bucks County Register of Wills

215-348-6265

US Dept. of Health and Human Services

Investigations, Office of the Inspector General

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org

24 - HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-490-8505