

FRAUD ALERT

February 2018

Valentine's Sweetheart Scam Targeting Senior Citizens

Financial abuse and scams are serious concerns. They deprive seniors of their hard-earned assets and retirement savings. Making matters worse, seniors, with limited incomes and earning potential, are rarely able to recover financially. Many times, the perpetrators are strangers preying upon older individuals who may be lonely, isolated, confused and appreciating some attention. The Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force warns residents of this cold hearted scam.

Beware of:

- A fraudster that may try to strike up a relationship on the phone or online via your computer. Sometimes they visit locations that seniors may frequent, like your local shopping mall or senior center, looking for victims.
- Scam artist may be male or female. The goal is the same, to try to trick you out of money or assets. They are usually charming and complimentary buy always smooth. They play on people's desire to socialize.
- After building a relationship the perpetrators misuse credit or debit cards or joint bank accounts; cash checks without authorization, including loan checks from credit card companies; steal benefit or pension checks; or pressure the older person to transfer assets to them. Sometimes a friend or relative with access to the victim's home, bank accounts and mail is the one stealing from the older person.

Bucks County Assistant District Attorney, Kathleen Byrne, warns seniors that she has convicted scam artist of stealing assets of seniors in Bucks County and it's always devastating to the victims, not only financially but personally.

Do not hesitate to report and stop these crimes!

Protect Yourself:

- Be wary of an early "I love you". Do lightning-fast romances happen? Of course. Are two people meant to be together, and feel it the second they meet? Yes, sometimes. But, the vast majority of people fall in love over time. You get to know the person intimately. You find out their flaws, and love them unconditionally. You meet their family and friends. It's a process. If someone you meet blurts this out after a week or two, alarm bells should be ringing.

If you suspect your new love is not all he or she appears to be, take a step back. Do the research.

- Research your "new sweetheart". Never take anyone at face value. The internet has given scammers an incredible resource. They can find images of people they want to look like, create fake websites, steal personal videos, and even create hundreds of phony friends. Do a reverse image search on their photos. Are they who they say they are? Are they insanely good looking? Check phone numbers. Check places like LinkedIn and Google+ to see if the information they have told you checks out. It never hurts to be too careful. If they seem too good to be true, they probably are.
- Scammers love to operate over phones and emails. They'll refuse to show their real face, or meet in person. You may want to consider a video chat website, such as skype.com or a cell phone app such as Facetime on Apple devices or Google Duo on Android devices. It won't automatically protect you from a scam, however, it's a step in the right direction.

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

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org

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