



CONSUMER ADVOCATE

From the Consumer Protection Section at the office of Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine

CRIMINAL PROSECUTION OF OHIO SCAMMERS

In mid-July, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine and Greene County Prosecuting Attorney Stephen K. Haller announced the indictment of three individuals for engaging in a tree-trimming theft operation that targeted elderly victims in Greene, Butler, Franklin, and Montgomery Counties.

The indictments were the latest development in a statewide effort to increase the number of consumer protection cases prosecuted criminally.

During National Consumer Protection Week in March 2011, Attorney General DeWine pledged to devote more of the office's resources to helping prosecutors take criminal action against scam artists operating in the state.

In Greene County, a grand jury indicted Jason R. Johnson, Timothy Henery, and Christopher Gibbs for engaging in a theft enterprise that targeted elderly consumers. The enterprise deceived victims into believing they needed tree trimming or lawn care work because their trees were diseased, damaged, or unsafe. The individuals accepted money for work that was never completed, and infiltrated legitimate tree trimming companies to trick their victims into believing they were credible.

Timothy Henery and Christopher Gibbs have been served their indictments. Jason R. Johnson, the leader of the operation, has not been located. He is a 28-year-old white male whose last known address was 2852 Red Coach Drive in Springfield, Ohio. Law enforcement officials are asking anyone with information about Mr. Johnson's whereabouts to call the Greene County Sheriff's Office at 937-376-5111.

The investigation into the criminal enterprise involved law enforcement

Continued on page 2

DON'T LET YOUR FAMILY FALL PREY TO "GRANPARENT SCAMS"

Grandparents across the state are continuing to lose money to scam artists posing as grandchildren.

Since January, the Attorney General's Office has received dozens of reports of grandparent scams from consumers across the state. In some cases, victims lose \$10,000 or more.

In a typical grandparent scam, con artists call grandparents and say, "Hi Grandma" or "Hi Grandpa," tricking grandparents into believing that their grandchild really is calling. Posing as grandchildren, the scammers claim that they are stuck in another country and need money. They may say, "Please, Grandma, don't tell my mom or dad. Let's keep this between us."

A Southeast Ohio consumer received a phone call from someone pretending to be her granddaughter. The caller claimed she was in jail in Mexico and needed \$5,800 to be released. Thinking her granddaughter was in trouble, the grandmother

Continued on page 2

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine recognizes that Ohio's small businesses are essential to growing the state's economy.

In support, the Attorney General's office provides a free complaint dispute resolution process for small businesses and nonprofits. This effort has helped save small businesses thousands of dollars.

Organizations should file complaints if they: have not received a product in the condition promised; have been charged for services they did not request; or have experienced other problems transacting with another business.

A Central Ohio pet daycare company paid almost \$3,000 to have new floors installed. The floors were not installed properly and needed to be repaired. The Attorney General's office intervened and the floors were replaced and installed suitably.

The Ohio Attorney General's Office also provides educational information for small businesses on complying with Ohio consumer law.

CRIMINAL PROSECUTION, *Continued*

officers from the Greene County A.C.E. Task Force, the Greene County Sheriff's Office, the West Chester Police Department, the Kettering Police Department, and the Ohio Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Division.

Led by Principal Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Blanton, the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Division works to identify potential criminal cases from the Consumer Protection Section, present them to local prosecutors, and coordinate assistance from the Ohio Attorney General's Office to aid in their prosecution.

Since March 2011, cases referred from the Ohio Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Division to local prosecutors have resulted in five indictments.

SCAM ALERT: ONLINE NOTARIZATION

"Online webcam notarization" is invalid in Ohio, but at least one company is claiming to provide a web-based notary service to consumers throughout the U.S.

Under Ohio law, if you need to get a document notarized to verify your signature on the document, you must be physically present with the notary public at the time you sign the document.

If you are not physically present (in person) with the notary public at the time of signing, the notarization is invalid and the document itself may become invalid.

SAFETY RECALL AND ALERTS: NEW CRIB STANDARDS

New crib standards from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) prohibit the manufacture and sale of dangerous, traditional drop-side cribs. They also require importers, distributors, manufacturers, and retailers to offer only cribs that meet new mandatory rules, including:

- Strengthening mattress supports and crib slats
- Requiring crib hardware to be more durable
- Making safety testing more rigorous

In a June 28 press release, the CPSC reported that it had recalled more than 11 million dangerous cribs since 2007. Drop-side cribs with detaching side rails were associated with at least 32 infant suffocation and strangulation deaths since 2000. The CPSC said the new standards aim to prevent these tragedies and keep children safer in their cribs.

Starting on December 28, 2012, child care facilities, including family child care homes and infant Head Start centers, as well as places of public accommodation, such as hotels and motels, and rental companies must use only cribs that comply with the new crib standards.

Source: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

GRANDPARENT SCAMS, *Continued*

wired the \$5,800. After sending the money, the grandmother received additional calls asking for more money. In all, she sent \$14,600. Later, she realized it was a scam; her real granddaughter was still in the U.S.

During the summer months, scam artists may check social networking websites to learn about someone's vacation plans and then contact that person's grandparents pretending to be the real grandchild.

To protect yourself and your family:

- Tell your loved ones about the grandparent scam.
- Never wire transfer money to someone who calls unexpectedly, even if the caller claims to be a grandchild or other family member.
- Ask callers questions that only your real family members would know how to answer.
- When in doubt, hang up and call another family member.
- Create a code word that only family members know to use in an emergency.
- Encourage your family not to post upcoming travel plans online.

WANT UPDATES?

- Receive the Consumer Advocate via e-mail by signing up at www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ConsumerAdvocate.
- Visit www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov for more information.
- Request a free consumer awareness workshop: www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ConsumerWorkshops
- File a consumer complaint: www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov/ConsumerComplaint