



Newport News Sheriff's Office

224 26th Street; Newport News, VA 23607 • 757.926.8535 • fax: 757.926.8429



MEDIA RELEASE

Contact:
Kathleen Carey, PIO
Newport News Sheriff's Office
Office: 757.926.8747
Cell: 757.813.6139
E-mail: kcarey@nngov.com

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Close Out Cyber Crime.
The Newport News Sheriff's Office
Shows You How.

by
Lt. Kathleen Carey, PIO

Hurricane season is upon us. With a hurricane comes another menace. Scam artists. These are the opportunity seekers who come out when winds die down and floodwaters recede. They pretend to be experts in home repair and tree cutting, while their real expertise lies in storytelling.

Anyone can fall prey to their trickery. But senior citizens tend to be the most vulnerable population. What makes them vulnerable? In part, they come from a generation that trusts people to do what they promise to do. Some seniors are polite to a fault. They don't want to be rude and walk away from a conversation or hang up the phone.

The challenge for the Newport News Sheriff's Office, Newport News, Virginia is to help seniors from being victimized. A good way to do that is through education. Wherever seniors gather – senior centers, churches, fraternal organization, ets. – deputies accept speaking engagements.

"How many of you use a computer?" asked Deputy Vickie Gaffney. About half of those attending an identity theft presentation at Zion Baptist Church raised their hands. Deputy Gaffney is pleasantly surprised by the number of seniors not afraid of technology. She also realized how important it is to get ahead of the game and inform them of Internet scams.

Some of the men and women attending the symposium at Zion Baptist had heard about lottery schemes, others about healthcare fraud and home repair rip-offs. But none of them had heard of Phishing and Pharming... the two latest cyber crimes.

It is not enough to just define each of the terms, pronounced "fishing" and "farming." Deputy Gaffney said, "Folks can get suckered-in by those scams which are the newest. Most people know they shouldn't give out their socials (Social Security Numbers). But a lot of older people are just now starting to sit in front of a computer. Cyber swindle is like a foreign language."

To take the mystery out of computer crime, Gaffney gave the audience specific scenarios of how the scammer tricks users into turning over personal information. Phishing is like fishing. It lures victims one at a time and catches them with bait. For example, the thief pretends to be from your bank and sends a pop-up message stating that you must enter your bank account number. They say their security has been breached and must close your account immediately unless they can verify the account number.

Pharming harvests a bundle of victims. Pharmers redirect Internet users from legitimate sites to counterfeit sites by manipulating the domain name system (DNS). For example, you are shopping on line and click on an item. You enter your credit card number, expiration date and mailing address. Unbeknownst to you, you have given a criminal your personal information.

Cyber crimes are difficult to track and solve. It is best not to get stung in the first place. Knowledge gives senior citizens the power to protect themselves.

Zion Baptist Church goers reviewed identity theft. They learned how an ID can be stolen and how it can be used. They received instruction on how to keep their identity private and what to do if they think someone got hold of it. They were encouraged to look closely at credit card statements and medical bills for services not rendered. They were reminded to shred documents before tossing them, warning that "dumpster divers" go through garbage looking for personal information.

"I have a friend that would like you to come to her church," said Helen Brown to Deputy Gaffney. "It happens every time I do a talk," responded Gaffney. "They will tell me where to speak next. Some want my business card to give out. It keeps my phone ringing. Word of mouth is spreading that we have this program."

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