

# Pigeon drop: Greed or gullibility?

As parents, we continuously tell our children not to go with strangers, not to talk to strangers. We do this in order to protect them from harm. The average parents do this for approximately 20 years or until the children are out on their own. Sometimes after that too. Therefore, it baffles me why an adult would go with a perfect stranger and fall prey to their various scams, one of which recently happened - The pigeon drop.



Since the money was obtained illegally, the attorney sees no reason why the scammers keep it. He suggests, however, they wait a few days while he checks to see if the police are investigating. One of the impostors then suggests that as an act of good faith, each of the three put up \$5,000. Usually the scammers drive the mark to his bank; he's the first to put up his "good faith" money.

In the most recent case, the scammers drove the victim to the bank and waited in the car for his return. One of the impostors then wrapped the victim's money and "\$75,000" (folded up newspapers) in a black bandanna, tied it up and put it in the victim's glove box. The impostor then told the victim not to open it until tomorrow morning. The victim indicated that after driving away he became concerned, stopped to open the bandanna, only to find that his money was gone and all he had was folded newspapers! The victim proceeded to the police department to file a report.

**HOW TO AVOID THIS SWINDLE:**  
 ■ Never expect something for nothing.

■ Do not turn money over to strangers who promise a substantial gain at a minimal risk. Very few legitimate transactions require cash.

■ Banks may consider posting "pigeon drop" material to give to someone that they think may be victimized.

Listed below are some other schemes that should be avoided.

**OVER-RING ON SALES:**

■ A dishonest store clerk can combat personal inflation problems by taking advantage of a customer's carelessness. Overcharging or shortchanging a customer can put money in his pocket.

**■ It is uncertain whether greed or gullibility takes over. The pigeon drop dates back 400 years; this is perhaps the oldest and most common swindle.**

**HOW TO AVOID THIS SWINDLE:**

■ Be sure the amount charged agrees with your sales slip.

■ Count your change.

■ Have a rough idea of what your total bill will be and how much change you should receive.

**THE \$12.95 BRICK:**

This swindle depends upon the victim's willingness to help his neighbor. A person dressed as a deliveryman arrives at the victim's door with a package addressed to a neighbor. He explains that the neighbor is not home and asks the victim to accept the package. By paying the \$12.95 C.O.D. charge and opening the package, the victim will save his neighbor from waiting in long lines at the Post Office. When the neighbor arrives home and the package is opened, it is discovered that the victim has paid \$12.95 for a three-pound brick.

**HOW TO AVOID THIS SWINDLE:**

■ Accept packages only if they're prepaid or you have been specifically asked to do so by a neighbor.

**HOME IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES**

Home improvement frauds are a very lucrative business, costing Americans more than \$500 million a year. There are many different ways people can be taken in by unscrupulous contractors. Offers to make a home a "show-model" for a very low price usually costs more than a legitimate contractor would charge. Another common tactic is to try to scare people into having needless repairs made. Scare tactics work particularly well for

repairs to items such as furnaces or water heaters.

**HOW TO AVOID THIS SWINDLE:**

■ Check out unknown contractors with the Better Business Bureau prior to signing any contracts or verbally agreeing to have services performed.

■ Be sure all promises of the salesman are written into the agreement.

■ Don't be pressed into signing a contract.

■ Obtain cost estimates from several reputable contractors.

■ Never sign a completion certificate until the work is completed to your satisfaction.

**POSTAL FRAUD**

Using the mail services for fraudulent purposes is in violation of Federal Law, yet each year Americans lose \$395 million to such schemes. Perhaps one of the cruelest swindles preys upon those who are mourning a recent death. From death notices, the con artist obtains information about the deceased. Based on this, he sends authentic-looking bills to the family. Often these bills are paid without question.

Other common frauds involve soliciting orders for non-existent products, chain letters, and offers to trace family trees.

**HOW TO AVOID THIS SWINDLE:**

■ Verify all questionable bills.

■ Contact the Better Business Bureau before ordering from an unknown firm.

Juliet McGlinch is a crime prevention specialist with the Farmington Hills Police Department. For more information, call her at 473-9640, ext. 637.

### RECREATION NEWS

**SWIMMING**  
 Come to the Centric Activities Center for an afternoon of swimming, basketball and/or volleyball from 12-2 p.m. Feb. 10. Bring your swim cap, towel, gym clothes and shoes for an afternoon of fun. Locks for lockers are recommended. The cost is \$3 per person payable at the door.

**SWIM LESSONS**  
 Lessons from parent/tot adults are available beginning the week of Feb. 17 through April 18 at the William Costello Activities Center Pool. The water temperature is 82 degrees, which provides a comfortable setting during the lesson. The session will run for 9 classes. A \$40 pre-registration fee is required at the Center activities center.

The Farmington Hills Recreation Director is offering a complete downhill ski program for all participants, fifth grade through high school, every Friday night at 12:00 p.m. Ski lessons will leave the drop-off pickup times at 11:00 a.m. and return at approximately 10 p.m. Fee includes lift tickets, ski lessons, and bus transportation. Ski rental is not included and will be collected on the bus. Pre-registration is required.

**SKI SKI**  
 Many local ski resorts are currently under way. Call 473-9670.

**YOUTH GOLF**  
 Registration for youth golf and club membership. The 1st game starts on April 10. The fee is \$25 per child.

## PTA Council hosts annual dinner

The Farmington Area PTA Council is hosting its annual PTA Founders' Day Dinner on Thursday, February 24. This year the dinner will be held at Vladimir, 28125 Grand River in Farmington Hills.

The purpose of the evening is to recommit to the goals set out by PTA's across the nation in supporting the education of children. The evening will begin at 7 p.m. Tickets, priced at \$25, may be obtained by calling Janet Holm, Farmington Area PTA Council President, no later than Friday, Feb. 18 at 248-553-2721.

## DEAN'S LIST

The following students from Farmington have earned a spot on the fall dean's list at Schoolcraft College: Elma Basaric, Shirley Rayoma Davis, Jeffrey

Stephen Mehall, Padma Suresh Nair, Barbara Elizabeth Possner, Tony Omar, Sanchez Espinosa, and Kimberly Ann Wisniewski.

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