

# NATI NEWSWIRE

## SENIOR SAFETY ISSUES

Benink, Jeanne (Moe) Irene <[JBenink@aarp.org](mailto:JBenink@aarp.org)> wrote: From: Benink, Jeanne (Moe) Irene [JBenink@aarp.org](mailto:JBenink@aarp.org) Subject: **Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes Fraud Sweeps Milwaukee**

Hi everyone, I've had 3 separate instances now of people in Milwaukee getting fake PCH sweepstakes checks. Each contains a letter that says that the individual has won \$\_\_\_ million dollars. Each contains a check for a few thousand to "cover their expenses". Then, the letter asks the winner to call "a representative of PCH" before cashing the check. It also instructs them to call a prescribed IRS representative as well prior to cashing the check.

The kicker here is that these are arriving in plain, white envelopes with a clear plastic window WITH A CANADIAN STAMP ON THE FRONT AS POSTAGE! They seem to be coming out of Quebec.

I have 2 of these in my possession now and have shared this with our friends at OPP. Susan is looking into this as I type this message. If you hear of any more of these, try to get the envelope, letter and check so that we can turn them over to OPP to keep building a paper trail.

Again, it seems confined so far to Milwaukee, but you may hear of other affected areas while you are out and about. If that does happen, please let me know.

Thank you one and all for your vigilance! As always, your talents are so very appreciated.

Best,

Jeanne Benink | AARP Wisconsin | State Program Coordinator 222 W. Washington Ave. | Suite 600 | Madison, WI 53703 Office: 608.286.6337 | Cell: 608.358.1038 Fax: 608.251.7612 [www.aarp.org/states/wi](http://www.aarp.org/states/wi)

Demand action and answers on health care and lifetime financial security. Go to [www.DividedWeFail.org](http://www.DividedWeFail.org)

### **Kansas City Cab Driver Sentenced for Embezzling \$640,000 from Wealthy Senior Citizen**

Taxi cab driver befriended then embezzled from a wealthy customer

Kansas City, MO - infoZine - John F. Wood, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a former taxi cab driver, who befriended then embezzled more than \$640,000 from a wealthy customer, was sentenced in federal court today for bank fraud.

Ringling Dan Cohn, 57, of Kansas City, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Ortrie D. Smith this morning to eight years in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered Cohn to pay \$640,820 in restitution.

Cohn became acquainted with Griffith Coombs, a wealthy man with assets estimated to be worth several million dollars, in July 2003, and served as his caretaker and legal guardian until Coombs' death in September 2005. For many years prior to July 2003, Coombs had worked as an antiques dealer and resided alone. Cohn worked as a Yellow Cab taxi driver and had regularly picked up and transported Coombs to various destinations.

On July 8, 2003, Coombs was diagnosed with fluid within the brain and received a surgically implanted shunt. Given his medical condition and inability to live independently, he was admitted to the skilled nursing home care section of Bishop Spencer Place in Kansas City, Mo., and eventually transferred to an independent-living apartment. On Aug. 21, 2004, Cohn moved Coombs out of Bishop Spencer Place and into the basement of his own house.

On Sept. 13, 2005, the Jackson County Division of Aging contacted Coombs at Cohn's residence. Coombs was wearing an old knit shirt and a diaper, covered with an old, dirty blanket. Coombs,

who was bedridden and unable to leave the room, was extremely dehydrated and confused. The basement was filthy and unusable.

Coombs was removed from the residence and died 12 days later at the age of 87 of natural causes. A subsequent search of the residence revealed new furniture in almost every room of the home, two large-screen television sets, new silverware, new accessories and numerous photographs of the Cohn family which had been taken and framed professionally.

Between July 2003 and September 2005, Cohn became the legal representative, guardian, attorney-in-fact, conservator and/or guardian, co-trustee, and beneficiary of Coombs and his property and financial assets, which were primarily contained in trust accounts with various banks.

During this time period, Cohn utilized his personal and legal guardianship relationships with Coombs to obtain money and property from those trust accounts for unauthorized purposes or self-enrichment - such as extensive personal property and automobiles, including a Hummer - rather than for the care and benefit of Coombs. Cohn admitted to making material false representations, possessing and negotiating unauthorized forged checks and instigating improper money gift payments to himself and others.

Cohn also admitted to defrauding financial institutions by misrepresenting or forging either his authority to write checks or his authority to withdraw Coombs' trust account funds, and/or misrepresented the use and purpose of those funds. For example, Cohn submitted forged and fraudulent letters, purportedly signed by Coombs, requesting 15 gift checks, each in the amount of \$11,000, be issued from Coombs' trust account and be provided to Cohn and others.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney K. Michael Warner. It was investigated by the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Article link:

[http://www.infozine.com/news/stories/op/storiesV  
iew/sid/31154/](http://www.infozine.com/news/stories/op/storiesView/sid/31154/)

**Identity theft** occurs when a criminal steals another person's identifying information, including their name, address, driver's license number, Social Security number, credit card numbers or other private financial account information.

Texas ranks second in the nation for incidences of the crime, according to the Federal Trade Commission. This crime can take many forms. An identity thief may rent an apartment under an assumed name, obtain a credit card with their victim's credit, or establish a telephone account after stealing someone else's personal information.

Identity theft is a serious crime. While some victims resolve their problems quickly, others spend hundreds of dollars and countless hours repairing damage to their reputation and credit record. Some identity theft victims may even miss job opportunities, or be denied loans for housing, education or vehicles because of negative information on their credit reports.

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America. To help Texans prevent or minimize the damage caused by identity theft, the Office of the Attorney General developed the Web site [www.texasfightsidtheft.gov](http://www.texasfightsidtheft.gov). Senior citizens can learn how to protect their personal identifying information by visiting this specialized Web site. This site also has video testimonials from actual victims who depict their struggles to restore their good name.

The OAG's identity theft Web site also has an Identity Theft Victim's Kit that offers a step-by-step checklist for who want to prevent further damage. Once Texans confirm that they have been a victim of identity theft, they should immediately close all bank, credit, utility and service accounts. Victims should contact one of the major credit bureaus and place fraud alerts or security freezes on their credit reports. This will prevent new accounts from being fraudulently opened under the victims' names.

For more information about steps Texans can take to protect their personal information, visit [www.protectyouridnow.org](http://www.protectyouridnow.org).

For more information on the efforts of my office to fight identity theft, visit [www.texasfightsidtheft.gov](http://www.texasfightsidtheft.gov).

Greg Abbott, Attorney General of Texas

## Peabody urges proper house numbering

By Jenny Amaral / The Daily Item

PEABODY - "If you don't put your number up, your number could be up," said Mayor Michael Bonfanti before a crowd at The Torigian Community Life Center.

It may sound confusing, but Bonfanti is actually referring to the number of your address. "A lot of people don't have their numbers up," he said. "Doing this could save your life."

The Peabody Triad Council, a partnership between senior citizens, the Essex County District Attorney's Office, the Essex County Sheriff's Department, the Peabody Council on Aging, and local law enforcement and service agencies, have organized a new program to help residents clearly mark their home address in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws.

Through its House Numbering Campaign, the Council is handing out fliers and holding events to educate individuals about the importance of properly identifying their homes and businesses.

"We're trying to make sure each house has numbers in the right place, at the right size so police and fire responders can easily find it," said Marge Carey of the Peabody Council on Aging. "We're just trying to get more safety to the seniors."

Massachusetts General Law and Peabody's own zoning by-law require that each building have a street number visible from the street. The numbers must be at least 4 inches in height, reflective, and in block style. They cannot be spelled out and must be in a contrasting color that stands out from the building. They must also be placed near the main entrance, no less than 4 feet and not more than 5 feet above the doorsill.

"We need to not only put the numbers up for ourselves and our own sake, but do it for those that you love and care for," said Bonfanti.

Bonfanti said that City Hall will be happy to provide assistance as best they can. There will be a supply of stickers available for those who need them. Any senior requiring assistance may also contact the Social Service Department at the Torigian Community Life Center for help at 978-531-2254.

## CAREGIVER TOOK \$304,000 FROM DECEASED WOMAN'S ESTATE

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT by [MARY CALLAHAN](#)

When Katherine Majerus died at the age of 96 in January 2006, her obituary singled out caregiver Marilyn Fenderson for "very special thanks and prayers for always being there during all these years, and for the love and care she gave."

It wasn't until weeks later that an attorney working through Majerus' estate learned the care provider had withdrawn

\$304,000 from accounts the widow had intended to give to three non-profit groups, Sonoma County authorities said.

Now Fenderson, 55, faces up to five years in prison after her conviction earlier this month on felony charges related to the theft, the Sonoma County District Attorney's Office said.

The Valley of the Moon Childrens Home, Forgotten Felines of Sonoma County, and Guide Dogs for the Blind have been left, meanwhile, without the \$100,000-plus each they would have received had Majerus' wishes been carried out.

"Our senior community is entitled to vigorous protection from those who attempt to take advantage of their generosity and trust," District Attorney Stephan Passalacqua said. "It is sad that because of this defendant's greed, three wonderful organizations will not receive the funds that Ms. Majerus gifted to them in her will."

Fenderson, convicted Oct. 10 after the jury deliberated less than an hour, is scheduled for sentencing Dec. 18, the District Attorney's Office said. She remains on supervised release pending sentencing, Sonoma County Jail personnel said.

Authorities said Fenderson met Majerus after the death of the older woman's husband, Edward, and cared for Majerus at her home on Earle Street in central Santa Rosa and later at Oakmont. Her malfeasance came to light after Fenderson, who had power of attorney, refused several requests to turn over pertinent bank records to a probate attorney handling Majerus' estate, prompting a sheriff's investigation.

Three months after Majerus' death, Fenderson withdrew the \$304,000 without informing the bank of her client's death and used \$180,000 to make a down payment on a Larkfield home, authorities said.

Fenderson was not named in the will, the District Attorney's Office said. Her house is now in foreclosure, the District Attorney's Office said.

## Website of the Month

*Add Events to the OVC National Calendar*

OVC invites you to add your fall and winter events to the National Calendar of Crime Victim Assistance-Related Events. The National Calendar helps you locate, plan, and promote victim assistance-related events nationwide, allowing you to connect with a larger victim service audience and gain national exposure. Add your conferences, trainings, observances, and other activities today. (OVC) For more information, visit:

<http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ovccalendar/>

## **Man accused of bilking senior of \$800G**

BY PATRICK BUCHNOWSKI

The Tribune-Democrat

— The owner of Mousey's Bar in Windber was jailed Friday after allegedly bilking an older woman out of more than \$800,000, West Hills Regional police said.

Authorities are calling Frank Andrew Solensky Jr., 54, of Somerset Avenue, Windber, a "financial predator."

Solensky, a former part-time police officer, is charged with a felony count of forgery and 18 felony counts of theft by deception.

In a court document, police said the scam began in the early 1990s when Solensky befriended the woman and became her caregiver and handyman.

Solensky allegedly billed the woman for home repairs that were never completed and inflated the cost of other items, including seven remote-control garage door openers for which he charged a total of \$16,670.

"He financially molested this lady," West Hills police Sgt. George Musulin III said.

"He took total unadulterated advantage of her."

Solensky was taken into custody by Windber police at his business, Musulin said.

He was a part-time police officer for Paint and Windber boroughs in the early 1990s, Musulin said.

Solensky waived extradition to Cambria County and was arraigned by District Judge John Barron of Upper Yoder Township.

He was sent to Cambria County Prison on \$50,000 bond. The alleged scam came to light in April when a relative of the woman – now in her 90s – began questioning checks paid to the handyman.

The family then hired an attorney and a CPA firm, Wessel and Co. of Johnstown, to conduct a forensic audit. The report detailed financial transactions dating from Sept. 1, 1993, to March 31, showing payouts totaling \$807,872.

Musulin said that because the statute of limitations on such cases is eight years, theft charges were filed on transactions dating from Oct. 1, 2000, to Sept. 30, 2008.

During that time the woman issued 268 checks to Solensky totaling \$668,519, Musulin said.

Musulin did not mince words when describing Solensky's actions.

"Predators wear a lot of different faces," he said. "There's sexual predators and there are financial predators. This man was a financial predator."

Authorities warn residents to care for older family members and neighbors before they fall prey to financial schemes. It is sometimes easy for trusting seniors to become victims.

"She trusted him implicitly," Musulin said. "That was her fatal error."

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## **Alcohol, Medications and the Older Adult**

Alcohol and medication misuse is a growing problem facing older adults today. Substance abuse among adults 60 and older is one of the greatest health challenges in the country. Greater attention to these issues among older adults can greatly improve the quality of their lives. For this reason, Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (VA ABC), Education Section, created the Alcohol and Aging Awareness Group (AAAG) in March 2007. The AAAG is a collaborative effort of over 35 public, private and not-for-profit organizations whose mission is to educate older adult consumers, their family members, and their service providers about the issues related to alcohol misuse and possible interactions between alcohol and medications in the aging population.

VA ABC, with the support of the AAAG, is distributing a brochure entitled, "The Best Is Yet to Come". This literature promotes older adults maintaining a healthy lifestyle and emphasizes obtaining knowledge about alcohol and medication interactions, the effect alcohol may have on older adults, and resources available if help is needed.

In addition, the AAAG provides educational presentations for older adults. Speakers presenting on the alcohol and aging topic are available to inform lay audiences about how taking medications or having particular lifestyles can trigger unusual responses to alcohol and pose special risks in older adults. [www.nationaltriad.org](http://www.nationaltriad.org) has a pdf version of a power point presentation created by the AAAG and presented at the 2008 National Triad Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia on October 10, '08.

The AAAG also conducts training sessions for health professionals and other service providers who give direct care to older adults. These trainings provide education about alcohol misuse and potential alcohol and medication interactions among older adults. Attendees receive instruction on valuable resources and learn how to address this topic with their clients, staff and families. A training conference is currently scheduled for April 7, 2009 in Richmond, Virginia.

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[www.sheriffs.org](http://www.sheriffs.org)



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