

# NATI NEWSWIRE

## SENIOR SAFETY ISSUES

### WOMAN OF MANY TALENTS *(TRUNCATED)*

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Carmen Lopez has been a nurse. She has been a teacher. If she were starting all over, she might go a completely different route. Picture Carmen Lopez, cop.

She has conducted in-service classes about Hispanic culture for the Columbus Police Department.

The Muscogee County Sheriff's department has had her conduct classes in what she calls "survivor Spanish."

"If there is a confrontation with a Spanish-speaking person," she explains, "the deputies need to know what is being said and planned, you know, key words like 'shoot' and 'slash.' "

Lopez has been through the Citizen Law Enforcement Academy, which affords private citizens the opportunity to better understand how law enforcement works through hands-on activities and classroom instruction.

(Including riding in a police car and visiting the jail) Much of her time is spent with SALT (Seniors and Law Enforcement Together), which serves as a sounding board, informant channel and catalyst for law enforcement agencies to address crime-related issues that affect senior citizens.

SALT sponsors crime prevention programs and recruits and trains volunteers to help the police department. It also acts as an advocacy group. Members interview other seniors to identify problems. It's a program aimed at reducing fear and providing moral support for the elderly.

"It's important to keep seniors aware about the dangers around them and to let them know where they can get help," said Columbus Police Maj. Wanna Barker-Wright, who leads the group, which meets each third Thursday at the public safety building.

Lopez says seniors need to be informed about all kinds of crimes. "There are financial scams, frauds," she said. "Home repair scams are a huge problem. Someone will take the person's money for housing work but just disappears. There are the telephone scams telling somebody they've won \$1 million but to collect they must first send \$5,000 for taxes. Tricks like that."

But some things are worse than a scam.

"There's abuse by family and others," she said. "We tell seniors how to protect themselves. We tell them about legal services." She mentions keeping people up to date about home invasions and what they can do to make their houses safer.

### Governor signs bills on elderly abuse

*Associated Press*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Willful abuse, neglect or exploitation of the elderly will become a felony under a bill signed by Governor Bredesen today.

Abusing elderly people can currently result in a misdemeanor or in felony aggravated assault, depending on the severity. Starting July 1st, willful elderly neglect will be a Class E felony. People convicted of Class E felonies serve an average of about 110 days in jail.

Twelve people have been convicted of misdemeanor elderly abuse over the past five years. Senator Charlotte Burks of Monterey and Representative Dennis Ferguson of Midtown were the main sponsors. The bill passed both chambers unanimously.

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### Inmate guilty of scamming elderly

BY WILLIAM A. WEATHERS | [WWEATHERS@ENQUIRER.COM](mailto:WWEATHERS@ENQUIRER.COM)

LEBANON - A 34-year-old inmate in the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility was found guilty Wednesday of employing a telephone scam to obtain credit card information from elderly victims.

Lonnie Bristow pleaded no contest and was found guilty of one count of misuse of credit cards and theft in Warren County Court of Common Pleas, said Warren County Prosecutor Rachel Hutzel. Bristow was sentenced to six months in prison on each charge, Hutzel said.

According to the prosecutor, Bristow obtained hotel telephone numbers through the mail. He then placed calls to hotels for other inmates using a three-way calling feature. While doing so, he was able to obtain credit card information from elderly victims.

The credit card information was then fraudulently used by inmates, resulting in financial loss to those elderly victims, Hutzel said.

"Elderly victims represent some of our most vulnerable citizens, and I will continue to aggressively prosecute these cases," Hutzel said.

### Senior citizen tax relief checks sent

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) Tax relief checks are in the mail to senior and disabled citizens who qualify for a special state program. The "senior freeze" checks average \$958 this year, the Treasury Department said. Under the program, low-income senior and disabled citizens are directly reimbursed by the state for property tax increases.

The program is separate from plans to send most homeowners checks averaging \$1,051 this year to help pay property taxes that are twice the national average.

The Treasury Department on Friday mailed \$121,709 checks, though residents still have until Aug. 15 to apply. On the Net: Division of Taxation:

<http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/propfrez.htm>.

### AS POPULATION AGES, PROBLEM OF 'WANDERING' ELDERLY RISES

By MARK AGEE Star-Telegram Staff Writer

A bill was signed in May that establishes a Silver Alert system beginning Sept. 1. It makes Texas one of five states with that type of program.

The system, modeled after the Amber Alert system for children, seeks to ensure the safe return of mentally impaired adults over 65 who are missing and possibly in danger, according to the text of the bill.

As with the Amber Alert, Silver Alert information will be distributed to police and to the public through the media.

State Rep. Joe Pickett, D-El Paso, wrote the bill after an elderly man in his district wandered away from home and was found dead several days later.

"There's been stories identical to that all over the state," Pickett said. "I just thought it was something that we needed to do. We protect our most vulnerable at the young end of the spectrum. It was time to go the other direction."

### SCAMMERS POSING AS UTILITY WORKERS VICTIMIZE ELDERLY IN SEMINOLE

Gary Taylor Sentinel Staff Writer

Elderly Seminole County residents are being targeted by crooks who try to gain access to their homes by posing as utility workers.

There were two incidents in Sanford earlier this week, Sanford police spokeswoman Cleo Cohen said. In both cases, the men told elderly women they worked with the power company and were there to trim trees, Cohen said.

In one case, the men, who had turned off power to the house, were able to get inside and one distracted the resident while the other was able to steal valuables from another area of the home.

The men, who speak with an accent, were driving a shiny green or blue, newer model, mini-van.

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### PROSECUTORS: CARETAKER STOLE \$300,000

By Dan P. Blake Tribune staff reporter

A secretary in Cook County Commissioner Jerry Butler's office siphoned about \$300,000 from an 87-year-old woman in her care, prosecutors alleged Wednesday.

Karen Bailey, 46, was ordered held on \$250,000 bail by Judge Laura Sullivan after prosecutors detailed how Mary Ann Wilson was found in her home in the 10900 block of South Sangamon Street abandoned and unable to walk or talk in May 2006.

Prosecutors said that as Wilson suffered increasingly from dementia, Bailey forged a power-of-attorney document, wrote 20 checks to herself and made several withdrawals from Wilson's banks, effectively emptying her accounts.

Steven Hunter, Bailey's attorney, said the Crete woman was like family to Wilson after Wilson married Bailey's father-in-law. Wilson thought so highly of her that she trusted Bailey with her finances, Hunter said in court.

Bailey had previously been sued in Probate Court for her alleged misconduct. During testimony in that case, Bailey acknowledged she and her husband, Wilson's stepson, built an addition to her house with Wilson's money. She also admitted that she withdrew about \$200,000 in cash that she stored in a box in Wilson's closet.

She faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted of the criminal theft charge. As a secretary in Butler's office, she earned about \$65,000, her lawyer said.

*Tribune staff reporter Alexa Aguilar contributed.*

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### Funding Opportunity for your Program

RMS and NATI provide funding opportunities for Triads, Domestic Violence, and other projects. To participate, RMS requests that your organization collect used cell phones and contact them at: **911CellphoneBank.com** or **terrih@sheriffs.org** RMS pays for shipping phones to them and returns usable cell phones to: law enforcement, senior programs, and domestic violence organizations—to provide cell phones to those in need in your community. Salable phones are recycled, with funds being returned to your organization. Contact RMS or NATI today.

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