

# Women's Institutes team up with Phonebusters to help stop scams

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An hour well spent this October could end up protecting your life savings from fraud.

The Women's Institutes of Grey and Bruce Area are hosting information meetings concerning the dangers of fraudulent telemarketing in mid-October in partnership with Phonebusters of North Bay and the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.

"The idea had come up because there have been quite a few frauds in the area, such as Port Elgin and Kincardine," said Lois Freiburger, president of the Bruce County district Women's Institute. She continued to explain that people have been taken for close to \$8000.

Guest speaker will be OPP Detective Sgt. Barry Elliott who has made his life's work since 1991, to put telemarketing scam artists out of business.

In 1993 Elliott established Phonebusters, a national task force that is based in North Bay. Phonebusters is part of the OPP anti-rackets branch and works with partners at the federal, provincial and private levels.

According to the OPP, since 1995 there have been 12,000 known victims of telemarketing fraud in Canada, 6,000 of them in Ontario. This has resulted in \$40 million loses, 80 per cent of it from victims 60 years and older.

"Students who go off to college are also susceptible and some have been preyed upon," said Ms. Freiburger.

Some gimmicks used by scam artists may include congratulating and guaranteeing the recipient that they will win a prize if they buy some of their products. They may also ask the recipient to send money up front for shipping. Some scam artists will identify themselves as lawyers/customs-officers/police-officers and will tell the person that you are entitled to a large cash settlement but need to pay the taxes in advance.

Det. Sgt. Elliott will quickly walk audiences through the steps of how to handle a suspicious call, how to detect fraud from real, when to give out a

credit card number and when not to and how you are protected by credit cards. How to respond to con artists, where to turn for help and equally important, how to detect when some member of your family or friend is being scammed.

Some quick tips to remember when dealing with a situation where you are unsure include: If you have really won a prize, it doesn't cost you a dime. You do not have to send money in advance, at a caller's request, to recover lost monies, receive an award or cash settlement. If you won a prize, you do not have to call any telephone number in order to claim your prize. In certain jurisdictions it is illegal to request an up front fee in order to obtain a loan.

The fall schedule will be a busy

one for Det. Sgt. Elliott. The Women's Institutes have set up meetings for him as follows: October 18 at 7:30 p.m. Meaford United Church, Meaford; October 20, 1:30 p.m. Women's Institute Hall, Colpoys Bay; October 20th 7:30 p.m. Chesley Community Centre, Chesley; October 21, 8:50 a.m. to 10 a.m. Grey Highland Secondary School, Flesherton; October 21, 1:30 p.m., Teeswater Town Hall, Teeswater; October 21, 7:30 p.m. Kincardine United Church, Kincardine; and October 22nd, 9:30 a.m. at Walkerton District Secondary School. Also Sgt. Elliott will be on CFOS 560 Owen Sound radio talk show on the morning of October 20th.

Women's Institute branches have long been active in their communities working towards safer and healthier

communities. This Women's Institute fall initiative, working with Phonebusters, may very well prevent unnecessary personal trauma caused by telemarketing fraud and could help people now affected bring these criminals to court.

If you think you are a victim or have any questions, you can contact the Phonebusters at 1-888-495-8501, fax them at (705)494-4008 or log onto their Website at: "www.gov.on.ca/phonebusters".

Women's Institutes welcome new members to assist in the challenge of "safer and healthier communities." Call Lois Freiburger for more information about Women's Institutes at 881-0511.