

## Consumer Warning

# Be aware of unscrupulous frozen - food sellers

People trying to put the freeze on grocery bills should be wary of unscrupulous frozen-food sellers, says Marilyn Gurevsky, of the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

Seniors, the consumers most inclined to prefer the convenience of at-home shopping, are considered at greater risk from dishonest door-to-door vendors.

High food prices have led many to seek ways to stretch the purchasing power of their dollars. One way of reducing costs is the frozen-food plan, which became popular in the early 1980s. Many consumers continue to participate in such plans, and are pleased with the results.

Unfortunately, unethical promoters are still in operation across the province.

In a recent case, says Gurevsky, two salesman used high-pressure sales tactics to convince a Mississauga woman to buy \$240 worth of meat, despite the fact she told them she rarely ate it. They told her they couldn't accept a cheque, then persuaded her to let them take her to the bank, where she made a cash withdrawal.

A few hours later they returned, and sold the same woman \$687 worth of meat and other frozen foods. A 17-year old freezer, complete with dents, dirt and rust, was included in the deal.

They were convicted of engaging in unfair business practices. One of the offenders had been found guilty of similar charges just four months earlier.

When a frozen-food salesperson appears on the doorstep, consumers can best protect their interests by asking themselves the same questions they would in a store.

Do I need and want this service now? The question may appear too obvious to mention, but high-pressure tactics used by some sellers can make it difficult to say no. Look at your reasons to buy.

If you find trips to the grocery store inconvenient or too great a temptation to impulse buy, a contract with a frozen-food dealer may be appropriate.

When arranged with a reputable firm, freezer plans offer more advantages than just home delivery. Meat, poultry and fish are often prepackaged in individual servings, which can be a real benefit for many seniors and is frequently difficult to find in the grocery store. But the novelty can quickly wear off if the variety of products included in the package isn't wide enough to give you a change of menu.

"Flounder fillets Florentine may taste terrific for a while," says Gurevsky, "but if it's the only fish supplied in a six-month plan you may not be so keen on it by the end."

Is the vendor honest? A reputable frozen-food company will describe the goods exactly, provide local references, and offer information about its office location and how long it has been in business.

When asked to do so, honest vendors will also be glad to return at another time to complete the sale,

leaving a copy of the proposed contract with you to consider.

This gives the consumer time to have contracts over \$500 reviewed by a lawyer or business advisor, and make a few calls to competitors to compare prices, or to other clients to check references.

"The key to satisfaction is to find out who you're dealing with, and read the contract carefully," says Gurevsky.

Ontario's Consumer Ministry encourages people to make sure they know all the facts before they sign on the dotted line. But if you enter

into an agreement and then decide it's not for you, all is not lost. It's possible you can benefit from a "cooling off" period, provided by the Consumer Protection Act.

"You have two working days - don't count Sundays or statutory holidays - from the date the contract was signed to cancel it," says Gurevsky. "You don't have to give a reason."

Send a letter by registered mail or hand deliver it to the seller stating that you are cancelling the contract as is your right under the Consumer Protection Act. The let-

ter should include your name and address, a description of the product, the date purchased and the price.

Brochures on the Consumer Protection Act, Business Practices Act and many related issues are available free from the Consumer Information Centre at 555 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario M7A 2H6, Tel. (416)326-8555 or (toll free) 1-800-268-1142. Ontario residents with an (807) area code may call the (416) line collect. The TDD line for the hearing impaired is (416)326-8566.

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## Hospital Auxiliary plans events

By BEV GOSS

Summer is over. The first meeting of the season of the Georgetown Hospital Auxiliary was held Sept. 12 under co-president Sophie Henley.

We hope to see you at our Nearly New Sale on October 13. This will be held in the Hospital Courtyard from 9 a.m. to 12.

In case of rain, we will hold the sale indoors at the same location. For further information call Vi Haines at 877-4593 or Nellie Hensing at 877-4253.

An early notice about the annual Christmas Dance - this will be held on December 7 at the Holy Cross Church Hall. More information about this in future but do make a note of the date.

Volunteers in the Auxiliary help out in the gift shop, wards, photographing babies, portering patients, hairdressing. We have teen volunteers also. Another aspect is fund raising.

Become a volunteer for the Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital.

Make life a little easier for the patients and support your hospital. Call Irene Patterson, 877-3724 or Betty West, 877-3866 for further information.