

Job scams target the most vulnerable

With higher unemployment rates, many people in Ontario are looking for new jobs. If you're scanning the want ads in newspapers and magazines, advice from Ontario's Consumer Ministry can help you spot fraudulent or misleading job offers.

Though sales pitches vary, job scams all have one thing in common. Sadly, they target those who can't afford to lose savings. They aim at taking money from

unsuspecting people looking for work.

"Job-hunters should be wary of advertisements offering positions in distant locations or foreign countries," says Marilyn Gurevsky of the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

"Ads promising large, quick profits through work-at-home plans should also be suspect," she says. "And if a prospective employer asks for money, a warning bell should sound in the job-

hunter's mind." Often these schemes sound like great opportunities. But many are scams providing jobs and money only for the scam artists.

When times are good, the ministry's Consumer Services Bureau report only one or two phone calls per month from people who've lost money in employment scams. But with the jobless rate on the rise, dishonest promoters are making big profits by taking advantage of the increas-

ing number of people looking for work. Consumer agencies are now receiving hundreds of calls about fake employment schemes.

"Our tracking shows the current situation is as bad as it has been since the last recession," Gurevsky warns. "And techniques now used to deceive the public are more sophisticated than they were in the early 1980s."

In one complex scheme, a classified ad is placed in an un-

suspecting newspaper to lure "candidates" for jobs in foreign countries. Those who answer are invited to interviews at a rented office, frequently a hotel suite or boardroom.

Job seekers are led to believe they're seeing an employer or employment agency representative. Following the interviews, all applicants are told they've got the job. Then comes the clincher - they're asked to hand over hundreds of dollars to cover the costs of visas, work permits and other arrangements.

Many don't realize their heads are only being hunted to add to the scam artist's collection of victims. Job seekers can be so excited at the prospect of moving to an exotic location they don't stop to wonder how the company has the authority to arrange for the permits - which it doesn't. The next day, the scam artist will be gone, along with the unfortunate applicants' money.

The Australian Consul General's Office has expressed concern about the many false offers of Australian jobs made in this country, reports the Better Business Bureau. Anyone offered a job abroad is advised to contact the company's corporate headquarters before accepting.

Another work-abroad gimmick is conducted entirely through the mail. People are asked to write away for an "information package" advertised as guaranteeing a job. The working of the advertisement may suggest it was placed by an employment agency.

The price can be \$24.95 or \$400 - both have been reported - with sums in between. The packages frequently contain nothing more than a list of companies, and instructions on how to prepare a resume. The list may come from an old telephone book, and many of the firms mentioned may not even be in business any longer.

Another type of scam involves ads for "work-at-home" plans. They have taken money from people around the world for years. The advertisements often tell consumers to write in "for further information on how to get rich quick."

Jobs offered range from stuffing envelopes to making handicrafts in your spare time. The envelope-stuffing scheme is usually an ad placed in a newspaper telling readers they can earn \$500 to \$1,000 per week in their own home stuffing envelopes. A person writes to the address, receives a one page letter vaguely outlining the job, and tells them to send an amount of money, usually \$20, and they will be on their way to making all kinds of money in their spare time. What the unsuspecting consumer usually receives back for \$20 is a half-dozen pages telling them how to place an ad in the local newspaper to inform companies that they are available to stuff envelopes for them. As with work-abroad schemes, the job-hunter's best defence is to be wary of any offer that insists you pay money.

Consumers with information about a job scam are asked to help others, by calling their local police station or the nearest Consumer Services Bureau. Bureau telephone numbers are listed in the telephone book Blue Pages.

For information on a variety of consumer topics, write to the Consumer Information Centre, 555 Yonge St., 1st Floor, Toronto, Ontario M7A 2H6.

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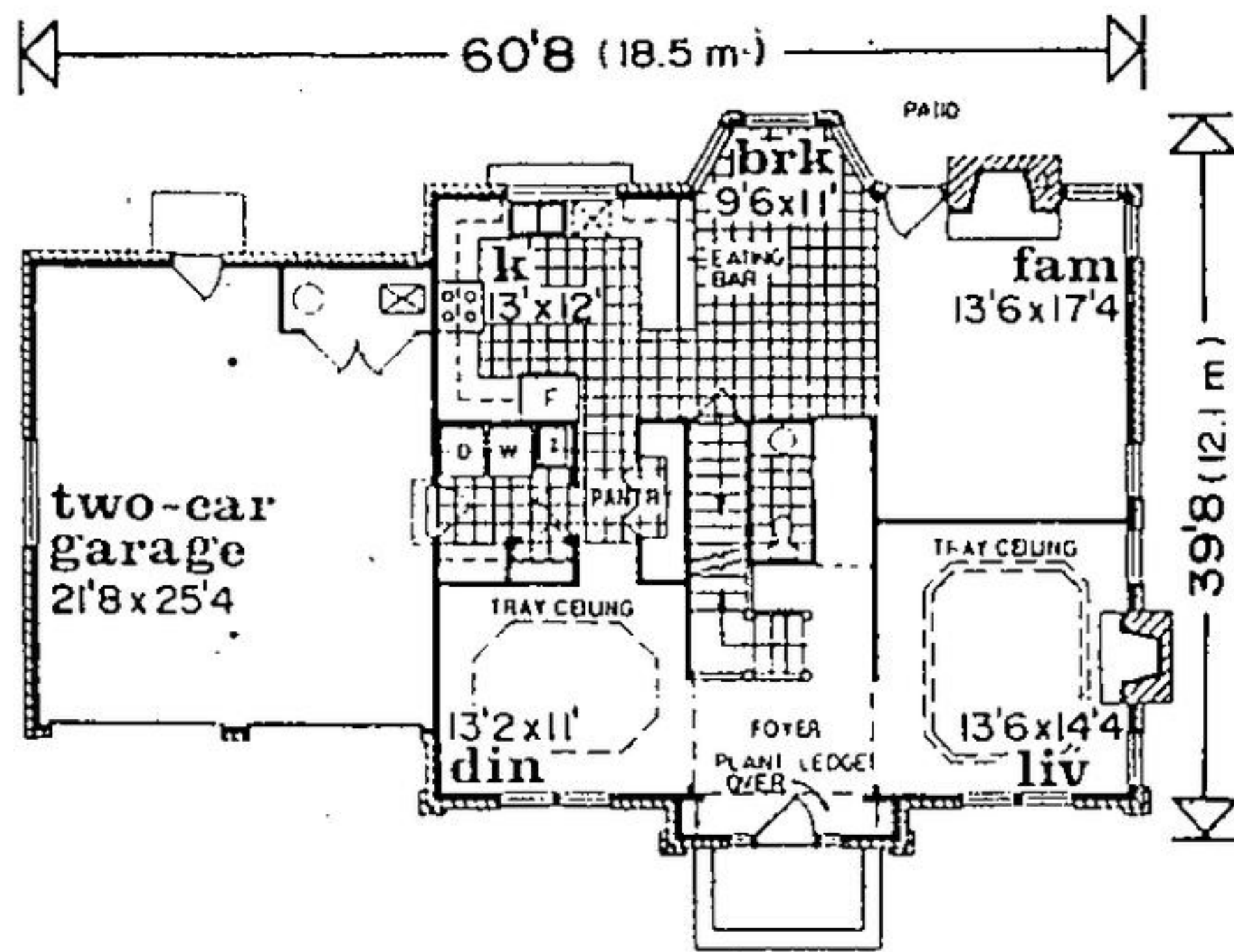
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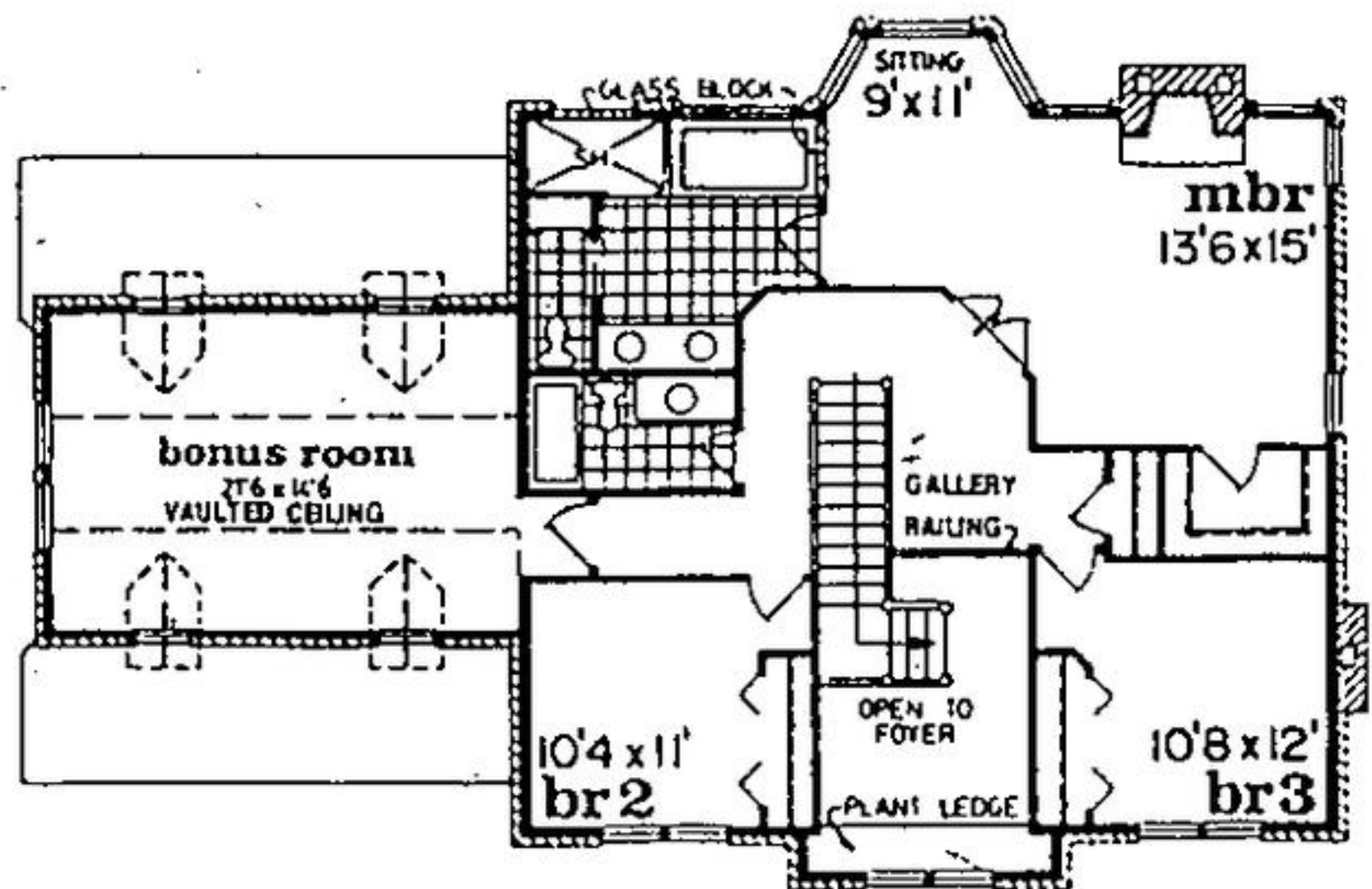
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