

Seniors need to be aware of The IRS Scam

Senior Beat

Carol Higgins Taylor



It used to be said there were only two things that one can be sure of in life: death and taxes. In today's world there is a third: scams.

Regardless of the subject matter, there is a scammer ready to pounce. Now, taxpayers are getting phone calls from individuals claiming to represent the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in an effort to defraud them.

"We have seen an increase in this scam over the last few years," said Jane Margesson, AARP Maine communications director. "To receive a menacing call that includes threats of arrest or fines is scary, and many consumers don't realize that the IRS would never make such a phone call, even if back taxes were legitimately owed."

In reality, IRS would send a letter concerning any tax discrepancy. They would never, under any circumstances, make an abusive phone call. But, because the scammers are skilled at spoofing, which is the process of rigging a caller ID box to make the call look legit, some people get so scared that they are coerced into doing whatever the scammer demands.

Thanks to the world of technology, the scammers

posing as IRS agents, are experts at creating profiles of their potential victims, often by searching social media sites before making contact with their target. Because the scammer may have personal information about the victim, such as family members' names, birthdays, or an employer's name, it makes them seem all the more legitimate.

"Consumers fall prey to scammers for a variety of reasons," Margesson said. "In the case of the IRS imposter scam, it's much easier for a con artist to dupe a victim if the scammer appears to be employed by a legitimate government agency and is familiar with the person's background."

The callers are aggressive, relentless and ruthless and once they have your attention, they will say anything to con you. Seniors may be particularly frightened by these tactics and more susceptible to the threats. Let's face it: No one wants to mess with the IRS. Scammers know that and take advantage of it. And this is the perfect time of year and April 15 looms.

If you receive calls claiming to be from the IRS and the caller uses threatening language demanding you pay immediately, that is a red flag that the call is bogus. Furthermore, the IRS contacts people by mail, not by phone, about unpaid taxes. And the IRS will never ask for payment over the phone using a credit card, a pre-paid debit card or wire transfer. If you are asked to do this, hang up. It is a scam. AARP Maine of-

fers the following tips to avoid the IRS Scam:

- Do not engage with anyone who calls or leaves a message claiming they are from the IRS. Call the IRS directly at 1-800-829-1040 if you have questions or concerns.

- Be very careful how much information you share online and set your social media privacy setting at the highest level.

- Don't be fooled if they know, or claim to know, the last four digits of your Social Security number. In the new high-tech world these numbers aren't that hard to find.

- Report fraud to the state's Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection at www.Credit.Maine.gov.

- Place a freeze on your credit report with all three major credit bureaus.

"We encourage all Mainers to place a freeze on their credit report because this is the most effective way to protect oneself from identity theft," said Margesson. "Thanks to a new law passed last fall, placing and removing the credit freeze is now free in Maine for residents of all ages."

The credit freeze prevents scammers from opening new credit in your name. It puts a big glitch in the scammers plans to steal your identity.

Learn more about tax scams on the genuine IRS website at www.irs.gov.

Carol Higgins Taylor is an advocate for seniors and owns Bryant Street Public Relations in Bangor. Email her at bryantstreetpr@gmail.com.

Bangor Public Library to hold preview to Maine Science Festival

As a preview event of the 2016 Maine Science Festival, the Bangor Public Library will host a discussion led by Mitchell Center Senior Fellow Linda Silka and Bangor City Councilor Ben Sprague of "The Signal and the Noise" by Nate Silver. All are welcome to join for this overview of Nate Silver's work, even if you haven't had a chance to read the book. This event is Wednesday, March 2 at 6:30pm, and is free-of-charge. If you have any questions, please email info@mainesciencefestival.org.

Nate Silver is a leading statistician and best-selling author known for his unique brand of creativity, journalism and statistical analysis. He is the founder of the award-winning website FiveThirtyEight, which was acquired by ESPN in 2013. Nate Silver will be the Headliner for this year's Maine Science Festival.

The Maine Science Festival, launched in 2015, is held annually with events across Downtown Bangor and at

the Cross Insurance Center. As the first-of-its kind in the State, the Maine Science Festival is a 3-day celebration of science and technology that aims to prove that science truly is everywhere. Organizers and partners of MSF want to encourage attendees to question the world around them and to inspire not only the next generation of scientists and engineers, but also facilitate grassroots scientific thinking at the citizen level.

The Second Annual Science Festival will take place March 18-20, with more than 50 events celebrating science scheduled for the weekend. To learn more, visit mainesciencefestival.org.

Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation of the Grand Lodge of Maine A.F. & A.M. award grants

For the second time in as many years, the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation of the Grand Lodge of Maine A.F. & A.M. will issue \$2,000 grants to 24 different non-profit organizations

throughout Maine, including Sarah's House.

Non-profit organizations were nominated by Freemasons throughout the state, who are committed to helping their local communities. A total of more than 65,000 votes were cast for these nominees by interested community members throughout Maine, resulting in the 24 winners; one from each of the 24 Maine Masonic Districts. Presentations of these grant checks will be made over the next several weeks.

"North American Freemasons collectively donate some \$3,000,000 per day to benefit society as a whole. In our state, the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation's initiatives alone total \$400,000.00 annually. We're committed to making our communities throughout Maine better by supporting non-profit organizations which enrich our lives and provide valuable services to Maine's citizens," said Mark Rustin, Grand Secretary for the Grand Lodge of Maine.

For information visit, MaineMason.org, or contact Grand Secretary Mark Rustin at 843-1086 or grandsecretary@mainemason.org

PCHC welcomes new staff at two locations

Penobscot Community Health Care recently announced that Meghan Mamula, DO, and Kristen Martin, DO, have been named Medical Directors of Brewer Medical Center and Penobscot Pediatrics respectively. Brewer Medical Center is located at 735 Wilson Street, Brewer, and Penobscot Pediatrics is located at 1068 Union Street, Bangor.

Dr. Mamula has been with PCHC for over 15 years, serving at Brewer Medical Center since 2009, most recently as Associate Medical Director. Dr. Mamula received her undergraduate degree from Purdue University and her Doctor of Osteopathy from the University of New England.

Dr. Martin has been with PCHC for almost 10 years, serving at Penobscot Pediatrics since 2006, most recently as Associate Medical Direc-

tor. Dr. Martin received her undergraduate degree from Bates College and her Doctor of Osteopathy from the University of New England.

Brewer Medical Center and Penobscot Pediatrics are both open seven days per week and, in addition to primary medical care, they offer Walk-In Care, Mental Health Services, and Care Management. PCHC patients also have access to specialty care, pharmacy, and dental services.

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