



Butte County

LAND OF NATURAL WEALTH AND BEAUTY

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ICE RETURNS \$20,000 TO ELDERLY NORTHERN CALIFORNIA LOTTERY SCAM VICTIM

OROVILLE, Calif. – Special agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Butte County District Attorney's Office today returned \$20,000 to an elderly Oroville man victimized by telemarketing con artists in Canada who promised him a \$2 million lottery windfall.

District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the money returned was sadly only a part of substantial amount of money the 74-year-old man had lost to Canadian scammers between September and December, 2005. Ramsey and ICE special agent Rick Eaton, assistant special agent-in-charge of the ICE office in Sacramento, said the ploy used on the Oroville victim is a common one employed by telemarketing fraudsters. The victim was told to obtain his lottery windfall, he would have to forward "processing" payments to the scammers. Every time the victim would send money to the scammers, they would call back and use various excuses that more money was required to obtain his lottery millions. The victim sent increasing amounts of money until a relative called the District Attorney's Office and tipped them off to what was happening.

Investigator Jos Van Hout from the D.A.'s Economic Crime Investigation Unit made contact with the victim and learned he had just mailed off another \$20,000 in cash to the Canadian scammers. Van Hout then made contact with Project COLT, a multi-agency initiative targeting telemarketing fraud involving ICE, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Federal Bureau of

Investigation, and the U.S. Postal Service Inspection Service. Canadian officials were able to locate and seize the packages containing the cash in Canada before they were delivered to the scammers.

Eaton and Ramsey warned consumers to be wary of such scams, which have already bilked people, especially senior citizens, out of tens of millions of dollars.

Canadian Lottery Scam

“Unfortunately, as is the case with this gentleman, most scam victims rarely get all their money back,” said Eaton. “We are doing everything we can to stop this kind of fraud, but the first line of defense is for people to be suspicious of people calling and asking them to send money.”

“These con artists are very believable,” Eaton added. “They pass themselves off as trustworthy, and are persistent until they get as much money as possible from their victims.”

Fraudulent telemarketers pose as lawyers, government officials, police officers, accountants or lottery company officials. The victims are told that they will receive a sum of money varying from thousands to millions of dollars in lottery winnings.

Ramsey stated “as we have always said, if it sounds too good to be true, it is.”

Initiated in 1998, the goal of Project COLT is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle telemarketing fraud operations. As part of the initiative, law enforcement officers strive to intercept funds (usually bank drafts and cashiers’ checks), so they can ultimately be returned to victims. Project COLT investigators also work to prevent further victimization both through public education and the prosecution of those who commit the fraud.

Project COLT members also have formed partnerships with Canada Border Services Agency, Canada Post Corporation, Federal Express, Purolator, United Parcel Service, DHL and other companies to assist with fund interception and return.

Before sending any money to telemarketers, ICE urges the public to contact the Project COLT toll-free hotline at: 1-888-495-8501. More information on the initiative is also available through the Project COLT web site: http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/qc/pro_ser/delits_e.htm.

Ramsey also noted his office’s toll-free hotline at 1-866-DA FRAUD and web site: www.buttecounty.net/da.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

The Butte County District Attorney’s Economic Crime Unit was established in March 2005 through funding from the Butte County Indian Gaming Local Community Benefit Special Fund in partnership with the Concow-Maidu Mooretown Rancheria and the Tyme-Maidu Berry Creek Rancheria.