

Dutchess County Office for the Aging's

AGING NEWS

For the week of March 3

Beat Scammers – By Thinking Like Scammers

Let's try a thought experiment: What if *you* were a scammer? What if scamming was your job, complete with a boss threatening you to keep the money coming in, or else?

"Know thine enemy" has been essential all-purpose advice for over 2,000 years, so let's peek at the inner workings of so many scam operations.

Who's Making That Annoying Call?

They could easily be a victim of human trafficking. Victims are targeted based on skills that can be exploited by scammers, like knowledge of English. The

victims respond to fraudulent job ads, and are kidnapped when they arrive at what they thought was their new job. The scam bosses typically set up shop in areas where they've bribed the local authorities to keep quiet.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates there are over 100,000 people who were trafficked to locked compounds, just in one city: Sihanoukville, Cambodia. There and in compounds around the world, hundreds of thousands more trafficking victims and their families are threatened with violence unless they conduct romance-baiting, phone, and other scams. A terrible situation, to be sure, but beyond OFA's power to solve.

Still, this is *your* money they're trying to steal and we're going to help you stop them as best we can.

Which Scammers Are Most Successful?

When OFA gives presentations on scam prevention, this question tends to stump audiences. That's to be expected, since they're not criminals. The answer isn't "phone scams" or any specific type of scam, but *any* scam that goes undetected and thus can be successfully repeated.

Scammers who target Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurers don't try for one big score, but rather file vast numbers of false claims that look just like everybody else's legitimate claims: \$40 for routine blood work, \$200 for an X-ray, and so on. One woman in Florida stole over \$100 million from Medicare between 2004 and 2008, using nothing more than her own laptop. Federal authorities say the vulnerabilities that allowed that fraud have been addressed, but scammers are always looking for new ways in.

A local example: At a recent OFA scam prevention presentation, one Pawling resident mentioned having had over \$15,000 in fraudulent Medicare claims for catheters filed under their name. Their doctor had never placed the orders, and the resident notified Medicare of the fraudulent claims. The fake claims appear to be part of a nationwide pattern of fraudulent orders dating back to

late 2022. Before that date, annual Medicare catheter claims stayed level at about 50,000 a year - and then skyrocketed to 450,000 by 2023. The total losses from Medicare catheter fraud alone stood at \$3 billion and counting as of 2024.

This is the classic tactic of "successful" health insurance scammers. They file massive numbers of fake claims until insurers notice the unusual claims pattern. Scammers pull up stakes before investigators can close in, and start a new pattern of fake claims in a new location, staying a step ahead of the law.

If you've read this far and concluded that a scammer's job wouldn't be for you, congratulations.

How Do These Scams Get Started?

Investigators who spoke with those who reported fraudulent claims say that some reported having received phone calls asking for their Medicare ID

number. Please remind yourself and your friends: **Medicare DOES NOT EVER cold-call people for any reason**, especially not to "verify" an ID. Other Medicare IDs were likely obtained through data breaches at health care providers.

When you receive a Medicare Summary Notice or explanation-of-benefits statement in the mail, don't just toss it because it says "This is not a bill" at the top. Read all your Medicare and insurance statements carefully, looking for anything that looks strange, especially claims from facilities you've never been to, procedures you've never had, or equipment you've never ordered. If you suspect Medicare fraud, call **800-633-4227** or use the fraud reporting tool at **medicare.gov**. For suspected fraud involving Medicare Advantage or a Medicare drug plan, call **877-772-3379**. A list of common scam prevention resources is at **dutchessny.gov/scamprevention**.

We Need Your Help Spreading The Word

Our socially-isolated friends and neighbors can easily miss out on ways to protect themselves. You can reach out to help them in many ways, including the OFA "Friendly Calls" program. We're always looking for volunteers to call socially-isolated Dutchess County older adults, once a week for eight weeks. It's the kind of volunteering that fits into just about everybody's schedule. Volunteers must be at least 18 years old. Email "Friendly Calls" coordinator Linda Edgar at ledgar@dutchessny.gov, or call **845-486-2555** to get started.

For more information on the scam-center industry in Asia and elsewhere, [take a look at this recent New York Times story.](#)

“PANCAKES IN THE PARK RETURNS”

(Registration opens Thu 3/6)

The approach of spring means it time for the FREE annual OFA “Pancakes in the Park” events for Dutchess County older adults (60+), co-hosted by Dutchess County Parks.

Registration opens on Thursday, March 6th.

This year, we're hosting two "Pancakes events" with a tasty pancake breakfast, plus games. Both events take place at 10:30 am. Pick one or the other:

- At the auditorium within the administration building at Bowdoin Park (85 Sheafe Rd., Wappingers Falls), on Thursday, March 27th.
- At the Pavilion at Brookmeade, 34 Brookmeade Dr. in Rhinebeck, on Wednesday, April 2nd.

Seating is limited and advance registration with OFA is required.

Registration opens on Thursday, March 6th; call us at 845-486-2555 during business hours to register. We cannot accept reservations left on voice mail or by email.

Guests must be Dutchess County residents age 60+.

Each participant gets a pancake breakfast accompanied by a splash of maple syrup tapped from Dutchess County maple trees. A limited amount of syrup will be available for purchase.

**TRI-TOWN (PLEASANT VALLEY) AND POUGHKEEPSIE OFA FRIENDSHIP
CENTERS NEED VOLUNTEER DRIVERS**

The OFA Friendship Centers at Tri-Town (1576 Main St. (US 44), Pleasant Valley, at the First Presbyterian Church) and Poughkeepsie (114 Delafield St., at OFA headquarters) both need volunteer drivers for our Home Delivered Meals Program (HDM) clients in Dutchess County.

Typical HDM driving hours are 9:30am-12:30pm weekdays. Mileage can be reimbursed for drivers who use their own vehicles for deliveries.

For more information and a printable volunteering form, see dutchessny.gov/ofavolunteer. For an online signup form, visit surveymonkey.com/r/WLQKB3Q.

“FRIENDLY CALLS” UPCOMING VOLUNTEER ORIENTATIONS

With OFA’s “Friendly Calls” program, you can choose to make phone calls to older adults at risk of social isolation, or you can choose to receive calls - or you can do both. For those of you who haven’t volunteered before and are exploring your possibilities, “Friendly Calls” can be ideal. A typical "Friendly Calls" series takes place once a week, for 20-30 minutes a call, for eight weeks. “Friendly Calls” volunteers must be at least 18 years of age. Those

who wish to receive calls must be Dutchess County residents at least 60 years of age.

Upcoming “Friendly Calls” orientations at OFA headquarters at 114 Delafield St. in Poughkeepsie are scheduled as follows:

Monday, March 3rd, 2:30 pm

Tuesday, March 11th, 10:00 am

Monday, March 17th, 2:30 pm

Tuesday, March 25th, 10:00 am

To schedule your orientation – they last about an hour – here at our Poughkeepsie office, call 845-486-2555 during business hours, or email ledgar@dutchessny.gov.

WE'RE BUSY WEEKENDS IN MARCH (AND APRIL)

Look for OFA on the road at the following Dutchess County events.

Details and signup information available at each link below:

Saturday, March 22nd, 11 am – Scam Prevention Presentation at Dover Plains Library, 1797 NY 22, Wingdale – [register online at this link](#)

Saturday, March 29th, 2-4 pm – Hudson Valley Hospice “Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans” event, for veterans in both Dutchess and Ulster Counties – at the Henry A. Wallace Center, Hyde Park. [Details here.](#)

Saturday, April 12th, 11 am – 2 pm – OFA at [YOUR County Health Fair](#), Falcon Hall, Dutchess Community College, Poughkeepsie (50 Mascot Dr.).

To arrange an OFA presentation for your civic organization in Dutchess County, email bjones@dutchessny.gov or call 845-486-2555.

Other news:

Want to find out more about what the Office for the Aging accomplished in 2024? It's on [pages 4-7 of this Dutchess County Executive Annual Report](#).

[Tips on keeping a home safe](#), especially for a loved one with dementia.

Eggs being hugely expensive lately, [you might be looking for substitutes](#) for baking and so forth.

A look back at the lives of recently-passed entertainment legends [Gene Hackman](#) and [Roberta Flack](#).

This week's birthdays:

2/28: Actress/singer [Bernadette Peters](#) (78)

2/29: U.S. astronaut [Jack Lousma](#) (Skylab 3) (89)

3/1: Actor/director/producer [Ron Howard](#) (71)

3/2: Musician/songwriter [Jon Bon Jovi](#) (63)

3/3: Singer/songwriter [Jennifer Warnes](#) (78)

3/4: Actor/comedian [Catherine O'Hara](#) (71)

3/5: Magician/actor/author [Penn Jillette](#) (70)

Of course, a Bad Joke:

I just got hired by a company that makes bicycle wheels. I'm the spokesperson.