

PERSONAL PROTECTION Police officer provides advice on safety and security

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VALPARAISO -- Scam artists fish for easy prey every day, according to Valparaiso police Sgt. Michael Grennes.

Grennes gave tips on protecting oneself during a recent workshop at the Village Park Enrichment Center at Banta. The seminar was part of a Lunch and Learn series funded through Northwest Indiana Community Action.

Grennes taught the audience basic home safety and security principles. He advised seniors to refrain from discussing personal matters over the telephone or Internet.

"Any e-mail that's asking for your information, delete it and call your bank. It's a problem, a fraud waiting to happen," said Grennes. "If it doesn't feel right or look right, it probably isn't right; don't do it. Trust your instincts."

Dolores R. Moen of Valparaiso said she wanted to learn about telephone scams to protect herself.

"I learned not to give any information, period," said Moen. "Now I will ask (the caller) the name of their company, and then I'll look it up and call back to see if it's legitimate."

Grennes encouraged audience members to pay for items and services with checks rather than cash. He referred to cash as "easy money," which makes a person a target for theft.

He also discouraged them from paying for services in advance. Paying after a job is completed prevents loss of money and unfinished labor, he said.

Later, Grennes explained that although many Web-based stores are legitimate, people should be cautious about buying items from foreign countries or paying from personal accounts. He suggested using prepaid credit cards that have limited funds.

Grennes also addressed issues of personal safety. He encouraged women to walk in pairs, change their daily patterns and carry a cell phone at all times.

He told the audience to keep their keys in their hand and to push the car alarm button to draw attention to any potential trouble.

Janice Mann of Valparaiso said she learned a lot at the seminar.

"I started walking recently. Now I'll always take my cell phone with me," she said. "I thought the seminar was very good. He gave us some good tips. He knew what he was talking about."

Grennes reminded the crowd that personal documents should be shredded. He explained that boxes from expensive items should be broken down before placing on the roadside for garbage collection, to prevent others from knowing what items are in the house.

Kathleen Scott of Valparaiso said she learned a lot about home and street safety.

"I'll be aware of outside noises and people that come to the door. It was a good reminder to be more careful," she said.

"Don't ever be afraid to make a lot of noise," said Grennes. "Don't be afraid to call 911. That's our job."