



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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IN THE NEWS: Police issue warning to Staten Island residents about 'deception burglaries'

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John M. Annese/Staten Island Advance By **John M. Annese/Staten Island Advance** on September 09, 2013 at 12:00 PM, updated September 09, 2013 at 12:02 PM

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. - They may pretend to be utility workers asking to read a meter, or sometimes they'll pretend to be a friend, hoping to capitalize on a senior citizen's advanced age and poor eyesight and trick their way into a house.

Even though police took down a band of gypsies responsible for a string of so-called "deception burglaries" on and off Staten Island earlier this year, law enforcement officials still warn residents -- and seniors in particular -- to be wary of any stranger knocking on their door, asking to come in.

A New Springville woman learned firsthand the need for wariness on Aug. 29, when a man and woman claiming to be National Grid workers called at 8:30 p.m., offering to talk about discounts, but only if she came down from her balcony and opened the door.

One said, "I can talk to you only so far from the balcony. You've got to come downstairs," recounted the woman, who spoke on condition of anonymity, saying she was afraid of retaliation.

The duo eventually left, and she contacted both the utility company and the police, she said.

An incident in St. George earlier this summer ended differently, police said. A man and woman knocked on a 73-year-old woman's door on July 6, pretended to know her, and asked to use the bathroom. As the home's resident showed the female visitor to the bathroom, the male found a wallet and stole a credit card, then used it to go shopping at the Staten Island Mall, according to police.

The NYPD Deputy Commissioner of Public Information's office released surveillance stills of two people wanted for questioning in connection with the incident last month.

The suspects in the aforementioned "deception burglary" strings also targeted seniors, according to authorities.

Typically, one of the scammers knocks on the front door, pretending to be a utility worker, and while the home's occupant is distracted, two or three more slip in to steal jewelry and other valuables.

Police arrested three of the suspects in that spree -- brothers Harvey and Mack Ely, 38 and 37, and Steven Mitchell, 54 -- in May, and a fourth, Ronnie Ristich, 56, in June. Harvey Ely was sentenced Aug. 26 to a two- to four-year prison term in connection with the burglaries. The cases against the other three are still pending resolution.

Also last month, Consolidated Edison warned its customers to be vigilant after receiving reports of scammers in Yonkers, Queens and the Bronx.

In those instances, con artists posing as Con Ed employees reportedly promised to lower their electricity bills in exchange for cash or a check on the spot.

The utility offered the following advice to its customers:

If you are approached by someone claiming to be from Con Edison, ask to see identification.

If you still have doubts, call 1-800-75-CONED to confirm the person is actually an employee.

If you think you've been victimized by a scam, call the police.

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