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Legal authorities give crime prevention tips to Mentor seniors

By Matt Skrajner, The News-Herald

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About 35 seniors recently gathered at the Mentor Senior Center for a Crime Safe event to learn tactics on how to prevent crime.

Members of the FBI, Lake County Probate Court Mentor and Mentor-on-the-Lake Police Departments covered numerous topics during the free, two-hour Crime Safe seminar, including home break-ins, scams, identity theft and computer crime.

Joe Tomsic, CEO of the Lake County Council on Aging, said the event was able to give seniors useful tools to both defend against and deter crime.

“This was a very important opportunity for all us to gather and hear some really critical tips and information, and got some assistance from each of these experts in the field of crime,” he said.

While the event may have been geared toward seniors, the crime prevention tips could help residents of all ages.

Sgt. Scott Daubenmire of the Mentor-on-the-Lake Police Department highlighted what he called the crime formula: means plus motive plus opportunity equals crime.

As an example, Daubenmire said by locking a car door, the seniors could take away the opportunity portion of the equation for a criminal looking to steal out of a vehicle.

“Without any one or more of these in the formula, crime cannot be committed,” he said.

Daubenmire added that getting a second opinion can often help potential victims avoid scams and fraud.

“Don’t think that you’re the only one getting these emails and scams,” he said. “Talk to a friend, talk to the police. We’ve dealt with these things before.”

Officers Marilyn Satterfield and Jim Collier with the Mentor Police Crime Prevention Unit told attendees to be wary of organizations soliciting over the phone for donations, even if they say they are from legitimate charities.

“You figure out who you want to donate to. You make the call,” said Collier. “(The criminals) are ruthless. They’ll take advantage of all those types of organizations that are doing good deeds out there.”

Satterfield added that giving to local organizations is usually a good way to avoid scams and ensure money is staying in the community.

FBI Special Agent Lisa Kaplan highlighted the importance of reporting crimes to the authorities.

“Crimes against the elderly are extremely under reported,” she said. “A lot of people think, ‘If I report this, my son or daughter or someone else is going to say I can’t take care of myself.’”

The criminals are counting on elderly victims to not report the crimes.

“Don’t help them out. Report it. Get them off the streets,” said Kaplan.

Lake County Probate Court Judge Mark Bartolotta also spoke about crimes from the financial side of life, particularly problems with power of attorney. Seniors need to be wary of who they sign that privilege over to.

“While the majority of times close friends and family have your best interests at heart, that’s not always the case,” he said. “I’ve been seeing a lot of that more and more lately.”

Evelyn Moore from Mentor said she enjoyed all of the speakers and took away a lot of useful information.

“People need to be aware,” she said. “Seniors need to be reminded.

The seminar was the first in a series. Another Crime Safe event is planned for the fall, said Frank Krupa, who organized the event.

“The best thing you can do is be prepared for things before they happen,” he said. “Nobody thinks the crime is going to happen to them.”

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