

SCAM ADVISORY: Woman loses nearly \$100K in celebrity impostor scam

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LEAVENWORTH, Kan. --- An investigation that saw a Leavenworth County woman lose over \$94,000 in a celebrity impostor scam engineered by a network of individuals living outside of the United States has recently concluded without criminal charges being able to be filed.

This “catfish” scam parallels a story involving recent claims by a Kentucky woman saying she was scammed by an online scam artist who talked her into sending \$10,000 in gift cards. The woman claimed she thought she was sending the gift cards to an actor who starred in the Netflix series Stranger Things.

County Attorney Todd Thompson is issuing this scam advisory to prevent others from becoming victims of similar schemes; Thompson offered the following comments regarding the scheme that bilked more than \$90,000 from a Leavenworth County woman. “This is an unfortunate situation, which saw an innocent woman being unknowingly taken advantage of,” said Thompson. “We’d love to pursue charges, but these internet scams are rarely solvable, and some of the hardest cases to prove because scammers could be anywhere in the world,” added Thompson.

Details of the scam emerged when the victim approached law enforcement. During multiple interviews with investigators, the victim detailed a story claiming that someone who claimed to be country music singer Neal McCoy coerced her into sending them cryptocurrency, cash, cell phones, passwords, gift card account numbers, and proceeds from selling an antique vehicle. The victim stated she met McCoy on a dating website in August 2021.

The victim went as far as attending a concert and reaching out and contacting the real McCoy’s staff before discovering the scam. Even after making contact, the victim found it difficult to realize the truth of this scam.

The victim would eventually be coerced into sending the scammers her personal information and new cell phones with active lines. Once the scam artists had her information, her account passwords were changed, and new credit card accounts were created.

“Many of us don’t realize just how easily someone can be coerced into doing something when that person is trying to be helpful.” Thompson added, “You might think you’d never share your private information with someone you’ve never met, but some of these operations are extremely calculated and prey on the goodwill of others.”

After an exhaustive investigation involving the County Attorney’s Office, local law enforcement partners, and the FBI, it was determined that the scammers were located in another country.”

Thompson offered the following tips to help avoid being scammed online:

- Be suspicious if someone contacts you and you don’t already know them
- Be cautious if someone only engages with you through text and email messaging
- Avoid providing personal information to someone you don’t know
- Never send money to someone – including gift cards
- Know that you are in control of your online communications
- If you absolutely must meet, do so in a public setting that is safe and let someone know where you’ll be
- Ask for help from the police, your bank, family, or friends if you think you’re being scammed
- Double-check email addresses when receiving emails and before clicking on any links