

Beware of Home Project Scams

Some offers are too good to be true

An Oregon couple recently received an offer they couldn't refuse - a promise to pave their entire driveway for \$1,500. The \$1,500 was the most homeowner Fern Mathews said they could afford.

That wasn't a problem for the workers who showed up at their house. "We'll work with you," one of them said. In fact, he had an extra truckload of material so he could give the Mathews a good price. Minutes later, the project was under way.

But instead of a freshly paved driveway for \$1,500, the Mathews ended up with a thin coat of soft, sandy gravel. And, once the two men started putting down material, they insisted on being paid \$4,700 to finish the work. In the end, Fern wrote a check for \$3,200.

"They make you nervous," the 67-year-old said. "It's just a scary situation."

That didn't stop her, however, from using a contact the men gave her to track them to a motel. Once she realized she wasn't getting a real paving job or her money back, she took down their license plates and contacted law enforcement.

"Our top priority is to protect our most vulnerable citizens--including the elderly," said Lt. Rob Wurpes of the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office. "We urge property owners throughout Oregon to exercise their good judgment when hiring a contractor, especially if the deal sounds too good to be true."

"We also encourage family members and neighbors to look out for citizens who may be especially vulnerable to financial scams."

While the CCB and law enforcement agencies are investigating the incident, Fern remained stuck with a mushy driveway as of early April. She warns others to beware of traveling construction workers who offer unrealistic discounts.

"Always use reputable contractors, check references and never pay all the money up front," added Berri Leslie, interim Construction Contractors Board administrator.

The contractors board recommends that property owners get a written contract for home improvement projects, even small ones.

Meanwhile, law enforcement and state regulators say the numbers of driveway, roof, and other home improvement scams will only increase as temperatures warm.

Here are some key ways to spot thieves: You don't call them - they show up at your doorstep. Their vehicles often show out-of-state license plates. They say they have leftover materials so they can give you a great

price. They quote an initial low price, then demand more to finish the project. Generally, they are not licensed with the Construction Contractors Board.

If you encounter a situation like this, call your local law enforcement agencies or the Construction Contractors Board (503-378-4621).

Wurpes said that once money changes hands, as it did in Fern's case, it becomes harder to pursue criminal charges against fraudulent contractors. Often, the cases must be resolved in civil court -- meaning additional time and expense for the victim.

"We're proud to partner with the Construction Contractors Board to combat this type of crime and make sure that perpetrators are held accountable whenever possible," Wurpes said. "Working together, we really can make a difference."

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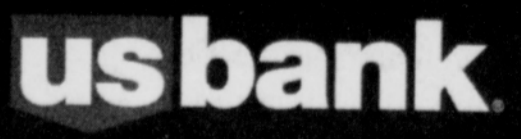
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Charles Jordan

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schools to engage youth through positive interaction and activities. As Fire Commissioner, he developed an outreach training program to recruit people of color to the Fire Bureau.

On the national stage, Jordan broadened the agenda of the environmental movement and land conservation to make it more inclusive. He is known for his groundbreaking approach to putting people - particularly people of color - at the heart of the American Conservation Movement.

"His great saying was 'Parks are more than just fun and games,'" says Michelle Harper, who worked with Jordan for years in several capacities. "He is a spiritual person with a strong connection to his church, and he saw us all as being connected. Portland's parks were where we could come together to build community and family."

Jordan's memorial service will be private, for family only.