FROM MY BACKYARD



By Byron Higgin, Mascot Publisher

Most of us can handle a harmless prank or two on April Fools' Day, but being a victim of a scam is no laughing matter.

Recently I got an email from CenturyLink warning folks about scams that some of their customers have falling into to and it's not pretty.

CenturyLink in their release tells us of a few:

U. S. Census Scam

Someone calls you claiming to be from the Census, the IRS or other "trusted" organization and asks you to divulge personal financial information, donations, and/or Social Security numbers. In addition, fraudsters now have devices that can make Caller ID display any number or name they choose such as "U.S. Census" or a similar identifier.

In rare instances, a Census worker may call to clarify information you've submitted, according to the Census Web site. But the U.S. Census does not conduct its work via the Internet — do not open any attachments or click on any links.

Here's how to protect yourself says CenturyLink: Never give out financial or personal information over the phone unless you are certain of the identity of the person or company who is requesting it.

Phishing Scam

Phishing e-mail messages are designed to steal your identity. They get your personal data by directing you to phony, but very realistic "secure" Web sites.

The phony URL is a total knock-off of a company's legitimate log-in site.

The sole purpose is to trick you into divulging your personal information so the operators can steal your identity and run up bills or commit crimes in your name.

How to protect yourself: Legitimate companies don't ask for personal information via email.

If you are concerned about your account, contact the company mentioned in the email using a telephone number you know to be genuine.

Don't cut and paste the link from the message into your Internet browser — phishers can make links look like they go to one place, but that actually send you to a different site.

Mystery Shopper Scam

How CenturyTel says it works: You receive a notice stating that you've been selected to participate in a "Mystery Shopper" program.

Along with the notice, you receive a check and are asked to wire money back through a money transfer company, such as Moneygram or Western Union.

Even though a bank may make the funds available when you cash the check, it does not mean the check will clear.

It can take weeks for a counterfeit check to be discovered, at which time the bank can deduct the amount that was originally deposited in your account, making you cover the loss.

How to protect yourself: If you receive this type of notice, delete it or throw it away. Do not send the money and do not cash the check.

BOTTOM LINE: Never give out information to people you don't know, and review your phone bill carefully. Be careful. There are reports of scams lately in Minneota. (Thanks CenturyLink for the information).

LAUGH A LITTLE: Biggest Liar

A clergyman was walking down the street when he came upon a group of about a dozen boys, all of them between 10 and 12 years of age.

The group surrounded a dog. Concerned lest the boys were hurting the dog, he went over and asked "What are you doing with that dog?"

One of the boys replied, "This dog is just an old neighborhood stray. We all want him, but only one of us can take him home. So we've decided that whichever one of us can tell the biggest lie will get to keep the dog."

Of course, the reverend was taken aback. "You boys shouldn't be having a contest telling lies!" he exclaimed. He then launched into a 10 minute sermon against lying, beginning, "Don't you boys know it's a sin to lie," and ending with, "Why, when I was your age, I never told a lie." There was dead silence for about a minute. Just as the reverend was beginning to think he'd gotten through to them, the smallest boy gave a deep sigh and said, "All right, give him the dog."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: As my Ole Pappy used to say, "You can make a lot more honey with sugar than with vinegar."

Ole Pappy liked to make sure his kids were on the straight and narrow, so I seldom had the chance to try the vinegar.