

# Identity theft can be avoided with common sense, safety measures

Dear Attorney General Kline:  
I recently received a phone call from a man claiming to be with the Federal government, who told me that Medicare had extra funding that had just been released. He then asked for the name of my bank and my account number so this money could be transferred to my account.

It was at that point I informed him I would do no such thing and hung up. Did I do the right thing?

Dear Kansas Consumer:  
Yes, you handled the situation properly.

Congratulations for recognizing this as an attempted theft of your identity. This is a very common form of what is known as a "phishing scam."

Identity theft continues to be a rapidly growing crime. Those who fall victim to this crime have been known to spend endless hours and



**Phill Kline**

## • Consumer Corner

many dollars in an attempt to undo credit report damage that can literally happen in a few seconds.

Here are some ways to properly protect your identity:

- Do not carry your Social Security card in your wallet or purse. Keep it at home in a secure location. There is not a law prohibiting businesses from requesting your Social Security Number (SSN) but there are very few instances in which you are required to give it. If a business requests your SSN, ask why that information is needed. Also, don't

have your SSN pre-printed on your personal checks.

- Don't leave mail in your mailbox or trash at the curb overnight. These practices are an invitation for unscrupulous individuals to search for your personal information. A stolen piece of mail with a check enclosed provides an identity thief with your bank account number.
- Shred invoices and any other items containing your personal financial information. If you are not shredding these documents, you should tear sensitive information

and dispose of the pieces in separate containers.

- Review your credit report once each year. You are entitled to one free copy of your credit report yearly from each of the three credit reporting entities: Equifax, Experian, and Transunion.
- Make sure you thoroughly review all monthly bank and credit card statements. Any unauthorized credit card charges or demand drafts (checks tendered without your signature) should be challenged immediately. For information on how to do that, call my Consumer Protection Division's 24 hour information line - (785-296-2424) - and listen to recordings posted in category 7.

- If you have not already done so, register all phone numbers on the National No-Call list by calling toll-free 1-888-382-1222. You should notice a drop in telephone solicitations three months after you register. If you are asked to buy something over the phone after registering, and the business is not one that you have bought from in the recent past, then file a complaint with my Consumer Protection Division.
- Keep a photocopy of the front and back of all credit cards in a secure place. If you become the victim of Identity Theft, you will then have relevant information at your fingertips to promptly cancel the stolen accounts.

If you think you may be the victim of Identity Theft you should immediately contact all financial institutions and credit bureaus, asking that a fraud alert be placed on your accounts. In addition, a police report should also be filed in the location where the theft occurred, and in your hometown. My Consumer Protection Division will send any and all Kansans who fall victim to ID thieves a helpful brochure detailing the steps needed to protect themselves. Merely call and ask for investigator Larry Larsen if you need advice about dealing with

Identity Theft.

For information on what can be done to protect against Identity Theft or what to do if a victim, contact the 24-hour Consumer Information Line at 785-296-2424 or visit my Web site at [www.ksag.org](http://www.ksag.org).

Attorney General Phill Kline offers this public service to help avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints or questions. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Phill Kline, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310.

## Officials urge proper food storage

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Food and Drug Administration are reminding consumers of the need to properly refrigerate carrot and other fruit and vegetable juices after purchasing them in order to avoid the risk of foodborne illnesses, including botulism.

On Friday, Georgia health officials announced three cases of foodborne botulism that may have been linked to the consumption of improperly refrigerated carrot juice. Many other people had purchased and consumed the same product without becoming ill. This fact lead officials to believe the three cases were likely the result of the product being improperly refrigerated after a consumer purchased it.

"Look for the words 'Keep Refrigerated' or 'Refrigerate After Opening' on juice labels to know whether juices should be refrigerated," said Mary Glassburner, director of the Kansas Department of

Health and Environment Bureau of Consumer Health.

"Many foods, including many fruit and vegetable juices, must be refrigerated below 40 degrees Fahrenheit for safety."

Glassburner said that refrigerator temperatures should be kept no higher than 40°F and freezers no higher than 0°F. Consumers should check the temperatures occasionally with an appliance thermometer.

Botulism is a rare but serious paralytic illness caused by botulinum toxin, which under certain conditions is produced by Clostridium botulinum, a common bacterium. Botulism can be fatal and is considered a medical emergency. Symptoms include double-vision, droopy eyelids and altered voice or trouble with speaking or swallowing, and paralysis on both sides of the body that progresses from the neck down, possibly followed by difficulty in breathing. People experiencing these problems should seek immediate medi-

cal attention. The most recently reported case of botulism in Kansas occurred in 2004. The patient, an infant, was hospitalized and survived. Consumers and retailers can call the Bureau of Consumer Health in Topeka at (785) 296-5600.

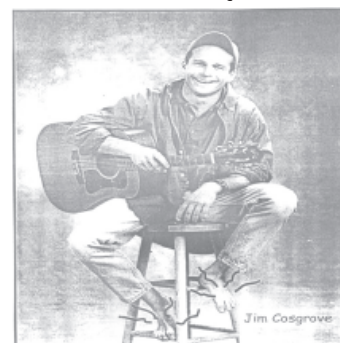
**Is your organization planning a project or event related to the arts, literacy, education, or professional development for educators? Would you like financial help?**

Please contact the  
Thomas County Community Foundation  
to apply for a grant from the  
Betty G. and James Secrest Fund.

Application deadline: Oct. 13, 2006.  
785-460-9152 [tccf@st-tel.net](mailto:tccf@st-tel.net)



## Mr. Stinky Feet's Beach Party



*Family Concert*

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**Tuesday, September 26, 2006  
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7:00 p.m.**

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Sponsored by: Colby Childcare Association, Smart Start & Colby Community College Resource & Referral.

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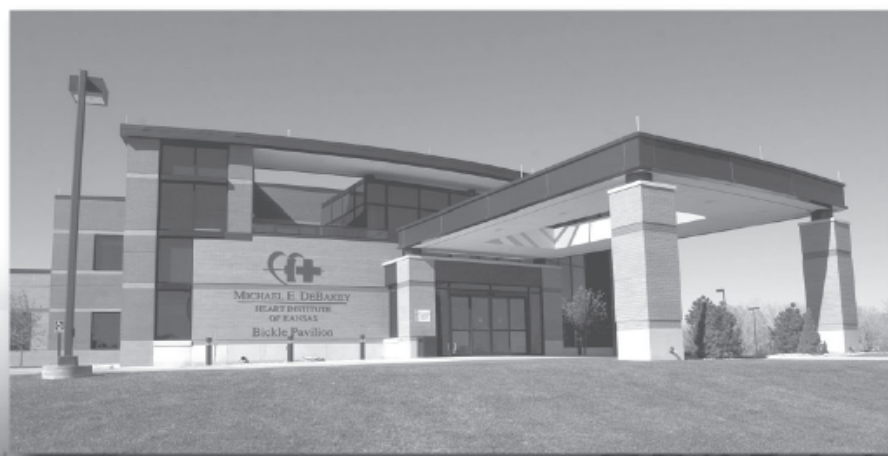
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**Citizens Medical Center - Colby**

For more information, call Toll Free 1-888-625-4699, or ask your primary care physician.



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