

FBI highlights growing trend in senior fraud

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It's a growing pandemic among the aging demographic in the United States and is often pervasive and unsettling.

Growing concern over aging fraud was addressed during a seminar in April at the Whidbey Island Center for the Arts in Langley.

FBI Supervisory Special Agent Ethan Via of the Seattle division led a seminar on preventing fraud targeted at aging adults.

Dozens attended the event hosted by the Mainspring Wealth Advisors of Raymond James in Langley. Via covered a variety of topics, included advanced fee scams, "grandparent" scams, email hacks and romance scams.

Via said currently one in five aging adults falls victim to fraud, while 95 percent are targeted.

Though the presentation was generally light-hearted, Via said the topic is typically one that is feared by many adults. If a person is careful, however, the scams can often be prevented, he said.

"In an increasingly digital age, it's going to become a little bit easier and easier for this stuff to happen," Via said.

"But, if you're cognizant of what you're doing and you stay on top of your

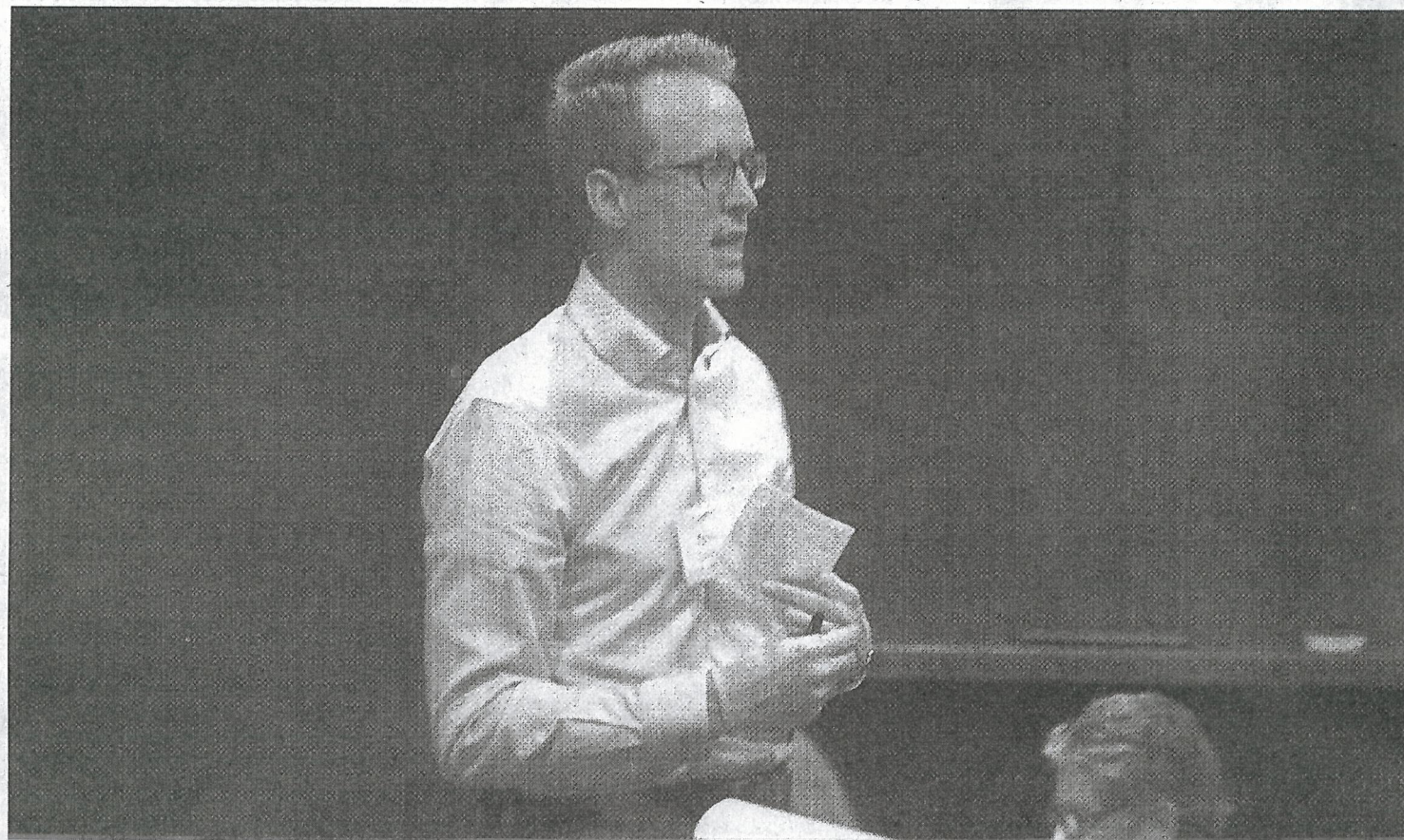


Photo by Evan Thompson

Tyrel Lacey, financial planner for Mainspring Wealth Advisors of Raymond James in Langley, gathered feedback from attendees on what brought them to the Aging and FBI Fraud Prevention Seminar April 20 at WICA.

finances and accounts, it's easy to prevent these catastrophic stories I'm about to tell you."

One of the more prevalent fraud strategies involves phony calls by Internal Revenue Service imposters.

The scam generally starts with a phone call, where the fraudster claims to be an agent with the IRS and states that the individ-

ual owes ample amounts of money in back taxes. The imposter utilizes these scare tactics by saying the situation can be cleared up by transferring \$500, for example, to a certain bank account.

If the person refuses, they typically threaten coming to their house and arresting them. When an imposter is good at their work, such as having control over their voice acting, it can often be a nail in the coffin.

"That can be very scary, especially to someone who doesn't have a good handle on their finances," Via said.

"They prey on fear. They can be very impos-

ing. They sound very legitimate."

Via said he works with the IRS regularly and that there's a simple flaw in the scheme.

"When we are going to arrest someone, we don't call them," Via said.

Once a person falls into the scheme or pays the imposter money, it's difficult to manage the situation, Via said.

Another common scam that utilizes phone calls involves the targeting of grandparents. The fraudster calls and says they are a grandson or granddaughter and that they've fallen into trouble, and that the only means of alleviating the situation is by

transferring money. As the phone call plays out, the imposter often adapts to their victims' reactions and dialogue.

"These people are very good at their jobs," Via said. "The people who are successful are very good at adapting their scripts so they know what to say in certain situations."

"These do seem like common-sensical things, but in the heat of the moment, you might not think things through."

Via said the best ways to prevent common scams are to screen phone calls, delete suspected emails, use debit cards carefully, buy a paper shredder, review bank accounts and credit reports regularly and verify the person you are talking to over the phone.

People should also notify the FBI or their bank if they suspect they've been scammed by filing reports at www.ic3.gov and www.ftc.gov/complaint

Among the crowd were Barbara and Linda Simmonds of Oak Harbor, who are about as seasoned as it comes to fraud prevention.

The Simmonds are targeted regularly via fake phone calls and letters, though they are well aware of the invalidity of the attempts by now. They also experienced a variety of the issues presented, including advanced fee scams.

The Simmonds said the promise of a prize, such as sweepstakes, are the most preventable of frauds.

"The best thing is not to answer the phone," Barbara Simmonds said. "Don't go for the sweepstakes."

Eric and Susan Dagle of Oak Harbor found the seminar to be informative. The Dagle's are admittedly fearful and elect not to put their information out in the cyber world when possible by avoiding common sites like Facebook.

They are also regularly targeted by imposters over the phone, so they decided to attend to be better equipped with knowledge on the matter.

"I thought it was awesome," Susan Dagle said. "I think they need to do more of them."

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