Vicki Westwood is one reason why elderly people must be vigilant

See inside story
ESSEX Trading Standards will be putting on a special show in the summer - an Aladdin’s cave of fake jewellery.

When the Trading Standards Institute holds its annual conference and exhibition at Bournemouth in June, they will see a display of £90,000 worth of counterfeit designer gems.

Among the haul is a necklace which was being offered for sale at £750 - as much as five times the price of the real thing.

Over 500 items of jewellery, marked as being by top designers including Chanel, Gucci, Tiffany, Bulgari and Rolex, were seized from a market stall in Essex - with most of the prices ranging from £10 to £50.

But one necklace labelled as Chanel - ‘gold’ and inlaid with unidentified stones - was marked up at £750. This is five times the price of some of Chanel’s genuine costume jewellery pieces.

“This is quite incredible - I have never come across an item of fake jewellery being sold at a higher price than the genuine article,' said Bryan Lewin, chairman of TSI, who is also a trading standards expert on counterfeit goods.

“We normally say that if an offer looks too good to be true, it probably is - and that would still be our advice.

“But this necklace is an exceptional case - and it goes to show that members of the public should not be guided by price as being an indication that goods are genuine.”

Essex trading standards department seized the haul of jewellery, including necklaces, bracelets, rings, earrings and watches from a market in the county two weeks ago. If the items were real and sold at full retail value, the haul would be worth up to £90,000.

“We recommend that all consumers to check to make sure there is a hallmark before buying jewellery made from precious metal.”

The exact location is not being disclosed as the department is still investigating and it does not wish to prejudice any possible prosecution.

Most of the items confiscated in the raid, which trading standards carried out with the support of police, were labelled as silver, although some of those supposed to be Chanel were gold in appearance.

Some had foreign markings indicating the quality of the metal but none were hallmarked, as required in Europe.

All are now being analysed by the Assay Office to discover if they are really silver or gold and, if so, whether they are of the quality indicated by the foreign markings on them. The source for the fakes is not yet known but it is thought they did not originate in this country.

Councillor Roger Walters, executive member for trading standards at Essex County Council, said: “We are determined to make sure that local people are not ripped off by unscrupulous traders.

“In the case of counterfeit goods, not only are consumers being conned but legitimate businesses are also losing out.

“The seizure of these items of jewellery is a prime example of how our trading standards professionals act to protect local people and the interests of legitimate business.”

Watch your pension

ESSEX Police is warning home owners to be aware of a security company that is cold calling residents in the county trying to make appointments to review their home security.

In some cases they are claiming that the Police are aware they are doing this, but Essex Police would never endorse such an approach from any organization and they are advising people not to make an appointment with such companies.

If you are concerned about your home security, contact a known local or national company for advice and get at least two quotes to make sure you are not paying more than the market price.

Also, make sure that you are aware of the costs and contract terms for maintaining and monitoring the system.

Trading Standards run a scheme called ‘Buy With Confidence’ where traders have to meet certain standards and are regularly monitored and vetted by TS officers.

Full details of traders in your area can be found at https://www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk or by phoning 08454 040506.

Ex-cops know the drill

RETIRED police officers are swapping handcuffs for hand tools in a bid to battle the number of cowboy builders targeting the vulnerable.

Former Met cops are being employed by a new “trustworthy” handyman service, operating in Redbridge and Waltham Forest.

The business Blue Local Handymen hopes to protect people against the rising number of cowboy builders and rogue traders targeting elderly and disabled people. Call 0800 255 0255 or go to www.trustinblue.com
Why you should be aware of false promises in the post

We want every old person to look at this picture. It is the face of a happy, confident woman who, six years ago, did not have any financial worries and enjoyed the life of a well-off pensioner.

She had £100,000 in the bank, her home was mortgage free and she enjoyed a good social life.

But don’t forget this face. Keep that smile firmly photographed in your mind and every time you get a letter or a phone call saying you have won a prize and need to send off just £40 to enjoy your new riches, remember the story of Vicki Westwood.

She was an ordinary pensioner with a huge nest-egg to enjoy for the rest of her life...until she answered her first postal lottery mailshot.

After that she kept chasing dreams and 81 year old Vicki died penniless on New Year’s Eve.

Unknown to her family, the retired hairdresser had been paying postal lottery scammers up to £1000 a week believing she was on the verge of winning loads of money. Over a six year period they had wiped out her £100,000 nestegg.

None of it came to light until her only son began looking into her finances following her death and discovered boxes crammed with letters from companies all across the world- all telling her that for a fee of £40 she would win a large cash prize.

The widow was persuaded to send money, supposedly for administrative fees, to dozens of fake companies with the promise she would receive her reward.

When Vicki tried to stop sending the money, she was plagued with phone calls from criminals pressuring her into posting them more cash.

Mrs Westwood was deluged with around 100 letters a week for six years along with dozens of phone calls.

Between 2008 and when she died on New Year’s Eve after developing septicaemia, she had been swindled out of more than £100,000.

The extent of the fraud was only uncovered when 50-year-old Russell Eaton was going through her bank accounts after she died.

News in brief

Watch your pension
ESSEX residents due to retire are being warned they face being targeted by fraudsters trying to get their hands on their pension pots.

The warning comes from the pensions regulator who said over-55s will be able to access their retirement funds in a lump sum for the first time.

But with millions of retirees gaining access to pots of cash worth sometimes hundreds of thousands of pounds, the fraudsters are already bombarding people with and texts promising ways to access their cash.

Bogus police alert
 DetectiveS are warning residents in the Harlow area to be wary after a sudden surge in phone calls by fraudsters posing as police officers. They received five reports in two days and in one case the thieves were successful in stealing money.

A police spokesman said: “Police would never ask you for your bank details or ask you to transfer or withdraw funds. If you do receive calls like these do not fall for their claims and just put the phone down immediately and contact police on 101 using a different phone if possible.”

Fake rugby tickets
RUGBY fans are being warned to stay alert to fake tickets and packages being sold for this year’s Rugby World Cup in England. Police and the Trading Standards e-Crime team have joined forces to combat fraud and buyers should check at www.rugbyworldcup/buyofficial.

Questions that all buyers should ask are whether am I actually getting, where will I be sitting, when will the tickets arrive etc. If you suspect a fraudulent transaction go to ER2015 at legal@england 2015.com
If you’re planning to have overgrown trees cut down, hedges trimmed or tree stumps removed, then make sure you are using a genuine established company otherwise you may end up being landed with a huge bill and the work not completed.

One such genuine company is Essex Tree Services Ltd based at Honeypots Farm, Gusted Hall Lane, Hockley, but it appears crooks have been using their name to extort money from vulnerable home owners.

The crooks – claiming they were Essex Tree Services - are believed to be responsible for a flat break-in at Lundy Close, Eastwood.

The flat owners agreed to have a tree cut down and roots removed and the occupants handed over a three-figure sum of cash stolen.

Police are investigating the case, but believe bogus flyers were distributed in the area to tout for work. But the real Essex Tree Services do not canvas door-to-door and only advertise their business in Yellow Pages and Yell.

Essex Tree Services Ltd is a genuine, trustworthy company with 25 years experience. The best way to ensure you only employ their services and not those of a rogue trader is to phone them on 01702-207011 and let them know if someone happens to knock on your door.

Chance are if someone is canvassing you they will be crooks trying to ruin the name of a legitimate company.

Pc Chris Martin from Southend police station said: “Specifically I am seeking a flyer distributed by the company in the area of Eastwood.”

Anyone with information is asked to contact Pc Martin on 101 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

This is the website of the genuine Essex Tree Services if you need work done in your home http://essextreeservicesltd.co.uk/

**News in brief**

**Holidaymakers lose £2.2m**

FRAUDSTERS conned British holidaymakers out of £2.2 million last year through a series of internet-based scams and deceptions.

Criminal groups have targeted online booking firms in order to swindle cash from unsuspecting customers, many of whom only discover they have been duped when they arrive at their accommodation and find no booking has been made.

Travel association ABTA, police and the Government’s Get Safe Online service have joined forces to urge caution for potential fraud victims when booking a holiday over the internet following the report from the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau.

One member of the public lost £62,000.

**Elderly are easy target**

OVER 53% of those aged 65 or above believe they’ve been targeted by fraudsters, a new Age UK survey has found.

While the majority didn’t give them the time of day, a third of older people who did get drawn in by a scam have lost £1,000 or more.

The study, conducted by Populus on behalf of the charity, highlighted the extent to which the older generation are targeted by fraudsters.

More than half of those over 65 have received a phone call, email, text or letter through the post that they think was a scam, although 60% never report it.

**070 number scam**

NEIGHBOURHOOD Watch has issued an alert to raise awareness of fraudsters using a variety of ways to trick victims into calling apparent mobile phone numbers beginning with “070” which transpire to be premium rate numbers.

Known as ‘personal numbers’, they are virtual numbers often programmed to forward incoming calls to one of a list of fixed or VoIP telephone numbers pre-selected by the client.

Although legitimate, calls to “070” numbers are charged at a premium rate. Calls from a landline can cost up to 65p p/min and may incur an additional call set-up fee of up to 51p. Calls from mobiles can cost up to £1.50 p/min. In some cases, victims have received triple figure phone bills.

**Safeguarding the elderly**

A NEW campaign has been launched to protect the elderly from rogue traders.

Essex County Council has teamed up with Essex Police and Age UK Essex for Be Sure at the Door.

It follows frauds totalling more than £3million when 18 pensioners in Colchester and Tendring were targeted.

Five members of the co-ordinated gang were subsequently jailed for a total of more than 27 years, but many more appear happy to take advantage of the elderly.

As part of the campaign special “community agents” will visit homes to offer advice on cold callers and how to spot genuine traders.

Fridge magnets will also be handed out, including contact details of who to call if you have concerns.

For details, visit buy with confidence.gov.uk or call 0845040506.

**Smart idea by the police**

SOUTHEND residents have been given a security boost after police issued them with the latest Smartwater security technology.

The Smartwater kits are used to mark valuable possessions with a uniquely coded liquid, which is only visible under UV light and can be traced back to the owner.

The liquid is almost impossible to remove and can be applied to items both indoors and outdoors.

Police officers and PCSOs have distributed the kits for free to residents in areas that have been targeted by burglars.

Any property that is marked with the liquid, which is guaranteed for five years, can be traced back to the owners using the unique DNA of each kit.

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**Produced by Who Can You Trust**

MAY 2015 edition