

Be careful who you hire for home improvements

Dear Attorney General Kline: An elderly neighbor of mine recently told me that a couple of men had approached him about doing some repair work on the roof of his house and garage.

When I asked him for some specifics as to who these men were and what company they worked for, he said they had driven up in an out-of-state truck and indicated they would return in a week or so.

I advised him to be wary of doing business with an outfit like the one he described, but I'm concerned he may be taken advantage of in the future. What can be done to protect him and others like him?

Dear Kansas Consumer: The advice you gave your neighbor is right on the mark; he's fortunate to have someone to trust. But



phill kline

• attorney general

unfortunately, the situation you described is becoming more and more common each year.

Immediately upon taking office, I created the Vulnerable Adults Task Force. The task force focuses on protecting Kansas' senior citizens and persons with disabilities from consumer fraud and exploitation through education, investigation and prosecution.

When considering home improvement projects, always try to

deal with local firms and never deal with firms with no business address. Companies that do business where they are located have more of an incentive to do the job right the first time. Firms that do not list an address may very well be a "travelers group," which are well-known for shoddy workmanship.

Research the company. Ask for references and contact the Better Business Bureau, local trade organizations and the Office of the Secretary of State seeking background information.

Get everything in writing. The agreement should be clear, concise and complete. Make sure an estimated start and completion date are

included, as well as a payment plan. Never pay for the entire job before work begins, and shy away from doing business with a home contractor that will not take a check or money order instead of cash.

"Cash only" is the hallmark of a contractor who does not want to be held responsible for payments received. If you pay by check, make sure it is dated to allow your three day right to cancel the sale.

If either you or someone you know has been targeted by a scam artist or is a vulnerable adult, help is available. As soon as you believe financial abuse has occurred, you should take these steps:

1. Report the incident to local law enforcement agencies and your county or district attorney.
2. Complete a consumer com-

plaint form and send it with all related documents to my Consumer Protection Division. If the consumer involved is elderly or disabled, be sure to note that on the complaint form.

3. File suit in small claims court if the amount is \$4,000 or less and both parties are within the state. You do not even have to hire an attorney.

In many cases, senior citizens who have lived their entire lives in our communities, who raised their kids, paid taxes, fought wars, scrimped and saved to have enough money to retire on, are now the targets of scammers and con-men who would leave them with nothing.

In other cases, adults with physical or mental handicaps must rely on others to meet their most basic needs, and these adults are victim-

ized by the very people they trust with everything they have.

Our mission is to protect those who have given so much from those who would steal as much as they could and to make justice for vulnerable adults a top priority.

Attorney General Phill Kline offers this public service to help you 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., 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-342-2310.

Goodland graduate on motorsports team that was 12th in nation

A 2003 Goodland High School graduate was on the Jayhawk Motorsports team that earned its best finish ever at the 2005 Society of Automotive Engineers Formula Car Challenge.

The team, made up of students from the University of Kansas School of Engineering, finished

12th in the competition May 18-22 in Pontiac, Mich.



Hall

Matt Hall, a junior in mechanical engineering, is the son of Fred and Sharon Hall of Goodland. He was on the team that designed, built and drove a small formula-style race car.

The Jayhawk team has placed in the top 25 in five

of the past seven years. Its 12th-place finish put KU's team ahead of all others from the Big 12 and above teams from several highly ranked engineering programs.

"These KU students have done a great job," said Robb Sorem, associate dean of engineering and faculty adviser for the team. "The rigor involved in getting to the competition, and in the competition itself, is demanding. They designed a

quality machine and then honed their skills to be top contenders."

The team of 24 students represents one of two schools in the nation to complete every aspect of the event in the past six Formula SAE competitions.

Only 140 teams are allowed to register for this international event, and not all are able to complete their vehicles in time.

The student teams begin their

year-long endeavor with a four-cylinder motorcycle engine and a 109-page rule book. The resulting competition cars and the student teams are judged in three categories — static inspection and engineering design, solo performance trials and high-performance track endurance.

Student teams submit detailed design information and make technical presentations during the competition. Students must adhere to safety rules and regulations during the design and construction of their vehicle as well as during the competition.

Internet tonight! Call 899-2338.



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CONTEST RULES

1. Winner is the entry which comes closest to guessing the day, hour and minute the first load of **2005 Sherman County wheat** arrives at the participating grain elevators with moisture content of 14 percent or less: **Goodland Mueller Grain or Frontier Equity Exchange** in Brewster, Ruleton or Goodland.

2. Entry guesses may be made only at **participating businesses advertised on these pages**. Look for the sign in the window of participating business places and sign up at their service counters. Check their merchandise and services while you are there!

3. Winner will receive the following amounts in scrip money good at any of these fine places of business: **1st prize: \$50; 2nd prize: \$35; 3rd prize: \$15.**

4. Persons age 18 or older are eligible to enter. No purchase necessary.

5. Deadline for entries: June 21. If the Sherman County harvest starts earlier, entry must be at least 24 hours prior to delivery of the first load.

6. Previous winners and previous first loads are ineligible, as are employees and relatives of The Goodland Star-News.

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