$30,000 RECOVERED FOR ELDERLY VICTIM OF FRAUD

Using Arizona’s civil asset forfeiture laws, the Yavapai County Sheriff’s Office and Yavapai County Attorney’s Office quickly seized $30,000 from a fraud scheme and returned it through court action to an elderly victim.

The fraud began when a person going by the name of “Jonh Caldwell” contacted a Prescott widow, age 89, through e-mail and social media. “Jonh” claimed to be an American military general who needed money to leave the war zone in Syria and/or Iran. Over a period of time, the widow was misled into believing she was assisting “Jonh” to escape the war and return to the United States. “Jonh” expressed his concerns about the war escalating, professed his love to the widow, and convinced her that she was the only one who could help him. He also promised to repay the funds to her when they could be together. “Jonh Caldwell” and another person by the name of “Mills,” who claimed to be associated with the United Nations, defrauded the widow of over $60,000 in several transactions.

The widow’s son reported the fraud to the Yavapai County Sheriff’s Office after learning that his mother had just transferred $30,000 to the fraudster’s bank account. Upon review of the e-mails, Google chat and Facebook correspondence between the widow and the fraudsters, the detectives noticed numerous grammar and spelling errors in the emails from “Jonh Caldwell” and “Mills” which is often consistent with fraudulent schemes. The Yavapai County Sheriff’s Office responded quickly using the asset forfeiture laws to freeze $30,000 in funds in the fraudster’s bank account before “Jonh” could transfer the money beyond the reach of law enforcement.

The Yavapai County Attorney’s Office then filed in court a civil forfeiture action and successfully obtained a court order to forfeit the $30,000. That money was delivered yesterday to the widow by the County Attorney’s Office.

Yavapai County Attorney Sheila Polk stated: “We are all very thankful for the quick actions of the Sheriff’s Office in freezing the fraudster’s bank account to save at least some of the widow’s money. This case illustrates what an important tool Arizona’s civil asset forfeiture laws are in the fight against financial fraud, especially in cases involving our senior citizens. Asset forfeiture laws allow us to pursue the recovery of funds even when the wrongdoer is beyond our jurisdiction for criminal charges.”

The Yavapai County Sheriff’s Office has referred the case for criminal investigation to Massachusetts, the last known location of the suspects.