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Mount Vernon postal employees thwart scam; \$315K at stake

March 15, 2014

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The potential loss of more than \$315,000 was thwarted by two Mount Vernon Post Office employees this fall.

Their story is being told now to help people avoid such scams.

In the fall, the Mount Vernon Post Office reported receiving 55 Priority Mail Express Flat Rate envelopes mailed from the Cornell College mailroom. The shipping labels could not be scanned from a website called "ShipRush.com," and the return address was listed as "Family Medicine" in Mount Vernon. A few days later, a college student dropped off another 78 similar mailings.

Mount Vernon postmaster Kim Raim was told the mailings were being handled for a professor, and the person provided the professor's first name.

Exercising caution, Raim contacted U.S. postal inspector Ron Jewell. Based on the information from Raim and Mount Vernon postal employee Kelley Wells, inspector Jewell contacted the college's dean of students. From the description and information that inspector Jewell received from Raim and Wells, he was able to speak with the college's dean of students to identify the student.

Inspector Jewell spoke with the student, who said she was offered a job doing payroll for what appeared to be a legitimate company. Inspector Jewell informed her that she was involved in a scam.

The student signed a Voluntary Discontinuance, and handed over the check paper and Postal Service envelopes that had been sent to her, which were intended to make everything appear legitimate by the fraudsters.

"American consumers are far more suspicious of mailings from overseas," said Inspector Jewell. "So some of the con artists now solicit help from local college students, who are looking to make an honest buck, while providing scam letters that originate in the United States."

"Those counterfeit checks were intended to be distributed across the country," said inspector Masami Knox. "Thanks to Kim and Kelley's concern for the U.S. Mail and postal customers, the inspection service was able to prevent a potential financial loss of more than \$315,000."