

COMMUNITY

Postal Service to phase out vending machines

Press Release

CALVERT CITY – The U.S. Postal Service will stop selling stamps out of vending machines at Post Offices and other retail locations in the Kentuckiana District by phasing out the units over the next two years.

During April and May, cash-only vending machines will be removed from the Calvert City location.

There are approximately 125 vending machines in 95 offices across the district. The decision to remove the machines was based on several factors.

Breakdowns of the aging machines are increasing and repair parts are no longer available.

Vending stamp sales are declining, service costs are increasing and some machines are generating less revenue than the cost of their overhead.

While many customers prefer the convenience of paying with a credit or debit card, the vending machines accept cash only. Retrofitting the machines to accept credit cards is not feasible.

The stamps vending machines are between seven and 20 years old, and all the machines will eventually be recycled.

Although it is not the case at every office or location, some machines had fewer than three customers per month.

A notice was posted on machines, at least 30 days in advance of removal, listing nearby Postal Offices and other locations where customers can buy stamps.

Today, Postal customers have a wide range of quick, easy and convenient ways to buy postage stamps; online at www.usps.com, by phone, by fax, by filling out a Stamp by Mail order form available from letter carriers and Post Offices, at commercial retail establishments, through banking and credit union ATMs, and at Automated Postal Centers. Stamps can also be obtained from rural carriers.

This press release was submitted by the United States Postal Service.

Man claims burglary, arrested for falsifying report

Insurance fraud costs Americans \$80 billion a year

By Misti Strader
Tribune-Courier News Editor
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BENTON – Nearly one in four Americans say it's "Okay" to defraud insurers, and one in 10 Americans say they would commit insurance fraud if they knew they could get away with it, according to a survey completed by the consulting firm, Accenture Ltd.

Indicative of those statistics, insurance fraud costs American consumers an estimated \$80 billion dollars per year.

That cost hits home in Marshall County as well, said Detective Dan Melone.

He estimates 10 percent of the felony theft reports coming through his office for investigation are fraudulent. One such case came through last week.

Melone reported that Randy Sellars of Benton, contacted the sheriff's department in regards to a burglary.

Sellars reported several items being stolen from his home, including a 60-inch television, other large-sized televisions, a drum set and various other large-ticket items.

Due to the nature of the case, it was turned over to the detective's division for further investigation.

"I thought this case was unusual early on," Melone said. "Most burglaries take place in less than two minutes. A burglary of this magnitude would have taken several people several hours to successfully commit."

Upon further investigation, Melone said it was revealed that Sellars had taken out a renter's insurance policy with Farm Bureau just four days prior to filing the theft report with police.

Sellars had consequently filed a claim on his new insurance policy for a total of \$38,000 in lost goods.

With his motive in question, Sellars was asked to voluntarily submit to a polygraph test, which Melone said he "failed miserably."

Melone said that upon further questioning, Sellars eventually admitted to falsifying items on the police report.

"He said he was in debt to some people and that they had stolen his television to settle the debt," Melone explained.

Sellars claims he owed \$1,800 on the television and was seeking a way to pay that debt when he filed the report.

Owner of Benton Farm Bureau Mickey Sirls said, "Fraud hurts everyone. It's the trickle-down effect because all of our customer's premiums are adjusted annually based on total claim percentages."

Farm Bureau insurance

adjuster Jerry Trimm added, "Just like a storm costs everyone, so do false claims."

Statistics indicate that one in every 10 people know someone who has committed insurance fraud.

Of that number, Trimm said, "It is the obligation of the public to let authorities know of activities such as false claims. Everyone should be concerned about insurance fraud, because everyone pays for it."

In summary of handling this case, Melone said, "In the time it took to investigate this case, I could have investigated a real case and helped a true victim. This kind of behavior is very frustrating for all of us."

CASA provide voice for abused, neglected kids

By Jess Nall
Tribune-Courier News Reporter

MURRAY – In the middle pages of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) brochure Margaret Mead is quoted saying, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

The volunteers of the CASA organization of Marshall County hope to do just that by giving a voice to abused or neglected children who, with no fault of their own, have currently found themselves in an unsuitable home.

The CASA programs purpose is "Bringing the voice of a child to the ears of the Court" by providing an adolescent with an advocate that explores the current residence and needs of the family.

There are currently over 900 CASA programs nationwide and 20 programs in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

The success of the Calloway County CASA program over the last few years was proof of the impact that CASA could have in Marshall County. In 2006, CASA advocated for 53 children in Calloway County, an increase of 18 percent from 2005.

Family court judge of Calloway and Marshall County, Hon. Rob Mattingly

was a supporter of the program. With help from Mattingly and an expansion grant from the National CASA Association, the CASA program was extended to Marshall County in September of 2007.

Mattingly began his profession dealing with divorce cases as Domestic Commissioner. His inability to investigate the living conditions of the child's home (other than through family members or attorneys) led to his passion for the CASA program.

"Before Family Court was brought into the court system, I wasn't able to look into the home of a child through a non-partisan point of view. Now, with guardian ad litem and CASA volunteers, the child is closely guarded and his/her best interest can be properly assessed."

A guardian ad litem is a court appointed attorney that represents the legal interest of the child. Despite good intentions, guardian ad litem aren't always as beneficial as a CASA volunteer. In some cases, Mattingly appoints a CASA volunteer to further examine the life of the child. Mattingly explained that guardian ad litem are an indispensable tool in the family court system, but with heavy case loads and government restrictions, further help is sometimes needed.

In such cases, CASA volunteers are handed a child

(or family of children) and their duty is to investigate what the child needs, where the child should live and what help can be offered. A major advantage a CASA volunteer has over a guardian ad litem is their ability to cross state lines.

"In some circumstances there is a child who has been removed from the home who has a family member that may be eligible to care for the child, but the relative lives in another state. CASA volunteers are able to go to the family members home and actually evaluate the living conditions," Mattingly said. "Before the CASA program, I wouldn't have been comfortable placing the child in an environment that hadn't been looked at. I have comfort in knowing someone has gone and actually checked out where the child would be living."

According to the national CASA website, "CASA volunteers are trained and supervised by a CASA program and appointed by a judge to represent the best interest of dependent, abused or neglected children in court." Volunteers go through 30 hours of training in courtroom procedure, social services processes, the juvenile justice system, the dynamics of child abuse and neglect and are sworn-in by the court before they are allowed to be appointed a case.

CASA volunteers speak with teachers, parents, relatives, social workers or anyone that has a major influence in the child's life. Volunteers also make visits to the home, do background checks, go through court documents and ask personal questions to the family members.

Mattingly said, "Volunteers can provide support that no one else in Court can provide. Advocates are able to spend more time with the child and recommend things like more counseling and build a one-on-one relationship."

Marshall County CASA volunteer Diana Thomason said, "When teens are involved, volunteers can act as mentors. As a volunteer you have to know that these children have been removed from their home, and that is always a traumatic experience. You become emotionally invested in your cases, and it is rewarding to know that you are helping someone."

Mattingly also said that the goal and responsibility of both the Family Court System and the CASA program is to re-unify the family and get them the help that they need. "Our goal is to never totally remove the child."

Thomason said, "As a volunteer, you have to speak solely for the child. There is no family reunion if it isn't in the child's best interest."

Thomason became involved with CASA after attending the Friends of CASA Breakfast Fundraiser. "They showed a heart-wrenching video about the program that really touched me. You have to have a heart for helping kids who can't help themselves."

Thomason also expressed that there was a great need for volunteers in Marshall County.

"Currently, I am the only volunteer who is actually from Marshall County. There are people from Calloway County representing children living in the Marshall County area, but we need more volunteers. There are some CASA workers that are balancing up to five cases or more, we need help so we can help every child that comes through the court system that needs a volunteer."

April is Child Abuse Prevention month, and CASA of Calloway and Marshall Counties will be hosting their Light of Hope banquet and silent auction. Events begin at 6 p.m. April 8 at Murray State University's Curris Center. Tickets are \$20 and may be purchased at Community Financial Services Bank (CFSB) locations in Benton and Murray. All proceeds will benefit CASA.

For more information about volunteering for CASA, contact (270) 761-0164, or casacc@murrayky.net.

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