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PAGE 15

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(SUN PHOTO BY NATALIE TRIMBLE)

Taraangini School of Dance performers do a traditional dance at Central Middle School in Eden Prairie for the PeopleFest! Party July 26. The annual week-long event (July 26-31) includes citywide offerings and educational events that highlight the diversity represented in Eden Prairie. **MORE PHOTOS ON PAGE 10.**

PeopleFest! celebrates diversity with cultural performances in Eden Prairie

Eden Prairie residents attended the PeopleFest! Party at Central Middle School July 26 to celebrate the vibrant cultures represented in the city. Event-goers could explore community exhibit booths, sample food vendors, and enjoy cultural performances by Twin Cities dance groups, including Away Runakuna: Ecuadorian Dance Group; Ballet Folklórico México Azteca; Taraangini School of Dance; and Titambe West African Dance & Drum Ensemble.

PeopleFest! is an annual community celebration of culture. The PeopleFest! Party is the main event to a week of citywide offerings and educational events from July 26-31 celebrating the unique cultures in Eden Prairie through music, dancing, storytelling, visual art, food and more.

For more information, visit community.edenpr.org/events/peoplefest.

Rental scam targets Eden Prairie homes, stealing thousands from victims

A rental property scam stole a total of $4,535 from victims

NATALIE TRIMBLE
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Every day, millions of unsuspecting individuals fall victim to fraudulent schemes that steal financial or personal information.

This summer, four individuals were victims of a rental property scam involving the same two houses in Eden Prairie, which are legitimately for sale and owned by a realty company. Scammers falsely advertised the homes on Craigslist and TikTok as rental properties and copied photos from the official online listings.

"They'll put a listing on those two sites and they'll make it look legitimate with pictures and post a monthly rent number that's incredibly low, so it's pretty attractive to people," Sgt. Matt O'Rourke of the Eden Prairie Police Department said. "Especially if you're not aware of the area and you would expect prices to be much higher than they're listed."

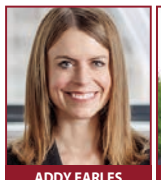
Prospective renters would contact the phone number listed on the fraudulent advertisement to schedule a time to tour the properties. Scammers would then cancel right before the confirmed meet-up times and share the self-guided tour instructions established by the legitimate realty company that owns the

See **SCAM** | **PAGE 13**

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Index

Education-Pages 2, 10, 11
Opinion-Pages 4-5
Public Safety-Page 8
Calendar-Page 14
Sports-Pages 15-18
Classifieds-Pages 23-27

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PUBLIC NOTICES: See pages19-20

Scam/From page 1

properties.

The unsuspecting applicants were advised to scan the QR codes posted on the properties by the legitimate seller and fill out the required forms. Once submitted, applicants were sent codes to access the homes for their tours, often completing the walk-through while on the phone with the scammer.

Victims later signed counterfeit lease documents and paid for the deposits and rental fees. One victim lost $3,365, two victims from the same family collectively lost $1,000 and another lost $170, according to a recent newsletter by the city of Eden Prairie. The victims also shared copies of their driver's licenses.

"If the potential renter likes the property, the scammer will be like, 'well, we need a deposit right now to reserve your spot.' So they will then send money through Zelle or Venmo, or whatever money transaction site," O'Rourke said. "And then they'll kind of lead them on. They might make them make a couple different transactions, just try to bleed as much money from these people as possible before they get suspicious and figure it out."



(METROCREATIVECONNECTION)

Emergency lights on top of a police car.

The four victims eventually caught on to the scam and reported it to the Eden Prairie Police Department. Unfortunately, the nature of instant financial transactions makes it difficult for police to successfully track scammers, leaving victims without an opportunity to receive reimbursement.

Fraudulent schemes are widespread. Nationally, 24% of adults report having disclosed personal information to scammers, according to a 2026 AP-NORC survey.

The survey also found that 58% of the public receives daily online messages or advertisements suspected to be scams, and 92% of adults face scamming attempts at least once a month.

O'Rourke reassured that rental scams don't occur often in the local area, but admits that scammers have become more creative and adaptable with their strategies, making it harder for police departments everywhere to crack down on the growing issue.

"Scams like it happen once in a while. This one in particular is just easy because of the process with the QR codes and getting a code to enter the property pretty easily," O'Rourke said. "These scammers are very creative and they're adaptable and they're, unfortunately, pretty crafty. So they will figure out any way to make money off people."

Since receiving reports from victims, local police have reached out to the legitimate seller to recommend a more secure system for promoting available listings, including limiting its use of easily accessible QR codes. The police department also added its own signage to the targeted properties to inform prospective buyers of the rental scams.

To help determine if a property listing is legitimate or not, the Federal Trade Commission recommends researching the owner or property manager to learn of others' experiences; be wary of unusually low rent costs; and tour the listing, but not without confirming that the seller/renter has the authority to sell/rent the property.

"I would ask more questions about the property; and if the price is too good to be true, it probably is," O'Rourke said. "Be suspicious, but no need to be paranoid. Just be suspicious about anything nowadays, especially if they're asking for money upfront through Zelle or Venmo, or anything like that."

For those that believe they've been a victim of a rental scam, contact the Eden Prairie Police Department at 952-949-6200.

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