By Ashleigh Noyes

Tribune Staff

Jim Hegarty, president of the Omaha Better Business Bureau office said that incidents being referred to as the “grandparent scam” are being reported to bureau offices around the country.

“It’s just another twist from the same old perpetrators who are trying to identify different ways to get individuals, particularly seniors, to wire money offshore,” Hegarty said.

“They make hundreds of calls every single day, trying to reel one person in.”

Karen Jensen, a resident of Lincoln, nearly fell victim to this scam.

She was contacted by a caller claiming to be her grandson Jake. “Jake” claimed to have been in a car accident while accompanying a friend to a relative’s funeral in Quebec, Canada.

The caller seemed very apologetic and embarrassed to be asking his “grandmother” for money to help him out of his predicament.

“Grandma this, Grandma that,” said Jensen. “When I think about it, it just makes me irate.”

The caller informed Jensen that his insurance would not pay the damages for the rental car right away, so he needed her to wire him $2,500 to cover the bill.

Jensen asked “Jake” if he wanted to call his father and he replied that he was to embarrassed and asked her not to say anything about his accident to anyone until he returned home.

The caller went as far as to hand the phone to a man who told Jensen he was a police office.

The “police officer” assured her that “Jake” would be fine and directed her to send a MoneyGram to an address in Canada.

After Jensen had withdrawn the funds from her bank, she went to Walmart to wire the funds. The Walmart employee assisting Jensen, questioned her several times about the funds, stating that she has recently tried, unsuccessfully to talk another woman out of doing the same thing.

The employee asked where Jake worked and contacted his office. When the real Jake was reached, he assured his grandmother that he was fine and had not been to Canada.

Jensen appreciated the Walmart employee caring enough to say something because she would have sent the money.

The “grandparent scam” is not the only scam out there targeting senior citizens.

An 87-year-old Omaha man received two calls from a man asking him to meet in order that he could pick up his contest winnings.

The man hung up both times, figuring this was a scam.

A timeshare scam cost another Lincoln resident $7,000 when the resident was asked to send processing and escrow fees before the finalization of the sale of his timeshare.

James Brueggeman, Perkins County Sheriff said that there have not yet been any reports of this type of scam made locally, however that does not mean residents should not be cautious.

“We need to get the word out on scams like this,” said Brueggeman.

“If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Be cautious, and *do not* give out any personal information to anyone asking for it over the phone,” he said.

The Better Business Bureau offers several tips to avoid falling for these scams:

1. Try to verify the caller’s identity by asking personal questions that a stranger could not know.

2. Do whatever is necessary to confirm the real relative’s whereabouts. Call their school, home or workplace.

3. Don’t send money unless you have verified that your relative is really in trouble.

There is a phone line set up by the Better Business Bureau dedicated to senior citizens who think they may be the target of a scam.

The phone number is 877-637-3334, and it is answered during normal business hours.