By Jan Goff
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Two local banks have been alerted to a breach at a company in New Jersey which handles credit and debit card transactions, leading to card cancellation and replacement.

According to the Nebraska Bankers Association, the data problem was reported by Heartland Payment Systems of Princeton, N.J., a company that processes approximately 100 million transactions a month for about 250,000 restaurants and small businesses nationwide.

Banks whose customers' accounts were compromised by the data breach include Adams Bank & Trust and Valley Bank & Trust. Neither Commercial State Bank of Elsie nor Pinnacle Bank of Grant had problems as of Monday.

As a precaution, cards were being stopped and reissued to 16 customers at Valley Bank & Trust, according to Don Softley, branch manager.

"Our bank was notified by Heartland Systems of the potential problem along with a list of the potentially affected customers. These customers were immediately notified by the bank," said Softley.

"The old cards are null and void, the old numbers ceased, and new ones have been established." Therefore, information the criminals potentially have on Valley Bank's customers is no longer valid, he said.

Softley said his assumption is that information technology employees at banks have been able to identify the accounts affected and banks have immediately alerted their customers and issued new cards.

Melanie Carman, retail branch manager at Adams Bank & Trust said their customers have also been affected, and the bank is taking immediate precaution.

"We want to stay on top of it so our customers have minimal exposure (to the breach)," said Carman. Stopping and reissuing cards takes a week to 10 days, she said.

As of Monday, Pinnacle Bank's customers were not affected by the data breach at the New Jersey company.

Fortunately, customer accounts at Commercial State Bank of Elsie were not compromised either.

Branch President Lonnie Tvrdik said it's a good reminder to people to monitor their statements closely.

"All in all, debit cards are safe," said Tvrdik. "We have more and more people using them all the time."

The Nebraska Bank Association said customers are protected against losses for unauthorized transactions, but urges people to monitor their bank accounts diligently, and to notify their banks of any activity appearing suspicious.