

- FRONT PAGE
- RANCHO MURIETA
- WILTON
- SECURITY LOGS
- OPINION
- OBITUARIES
- TOWN CALENDAR
- CLASSIFIED
- REAL ESTATE
- SUBSCRIBE
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River Valley Times

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SSD detective gives presentation at Wilton Neighborhood Watch

By Fran Soto
River Valley Times Staff

- Sacramento Sheriff's Detective Eric Pahlberg led a thorough, informative discussion on protecting oneself against the increasing crime of identity thief on March 8 in Wilton. "It is the crime du jour," Pahlberg said at the Wilton Neighborhood Watch meeting. "And it is unlikely anyone is going to get caught."

Pahlberg was the latest speaker invited to the group's monthly meetings to keep residents updated on their neighborhood, as well as inform them about crime-fighting measures. Although this Neighborhood Watch program covers the Bonnie Vista and Ringwood neighborhoods, the meetings are open to all interested Wilton residents. This meeting was one of the first the group has held, and members say they hope for a bigger turnout in the future. Pahlberg, a 20-year veteran with the Sacramento Sheriff's Department, is assigned to the Identity Theft Task Force. "Identity theft is when someone uses your information to do bad things," Pahlberg said. "They do it because there is a lot of money to be made, and it's usually for dope."

Pahlberg told the members present that their personal information is usually obtained through mail theft and burglaries, or by bribing employees to steal account records. Offenders may also pose as a legitimate business and purchase information from a clearinghouse, or through dumpster diving, Internet sources and phishing. "Phishing is a practice where someone sets up a website that looks a lot like a reputable company," Pahlberg said. "Don't give them information, and don't click on a link in an e-mail that you've received."

The detective also explained how the theft of personal information is then transferred to a card such as a magnetized hotel key card, how a computer program can generate credit card numbers and even how \$5 bills are stripped and reprinted in larger denominations. "That way when a clerk tests the bill, there's no black mark," he said.

Using several different easy-to-obtain computer programs, the detective demonstrated to the audience how the offender can print checks using the information off a stolen check. Also using a Photoshop program, counterfeit drivers' licenses can be created.

A third program generates possible credit card numbers, which are transferred to a hotel card key and then tried in automated gas pumps until one works. The owner of that credit card number would not even have had any personal information stolen.

Credit card numbers can also be obtained by skimming, which is when a waiter or clerk uses a small machine to record a number for their own use. "You can also have your number stolen by someone using a cell phone to take a picture of your card," Pahlberg said. "The way to protect yourself is to check your statements, secure personal information and think about what you're carrying in your wallet."

He also encouraged residents to check credit reports on a regular basis, pay attention to billing cycles, put passwords on accounts, pick up check orders at the bank and don't leave mail in your mailbox.

Also in attendance at the meeting was Laura Grossman, Community Services specialist with the Sacramento Sheriff's Department. Grossman is instrumental in helping residents form Neighborhood Watch programs and provided brochures and other printed material on identity theft and other crimes at the meeting. "Not all cases are when information is stolen from a mailbox," Grossman said. "I know of one case where a friend stole a friend's identity."

In other business, resident George Scott gave an update on ongoing security projects. The next Neighborhood Watch meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 12 at 7 p.m. at the WFD Station 81 on the corner of Dillard and Wilton roads. All interested members of the community are invited to attend.



Photo by Fran Soto
 Speaking to members of the Neighborhood Watch group, Sacramento Sheriff's Detective Eric Pahlberg spells out the consequences of identity theft and how someone's identity is stolen.

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