

THE GEEK CORNER

By Dan Law

Almost every time we turn on the television or open the newspaper, we see news of another unfortunate soul who has been scammed or ripped off by another cunning thief. What would you do if the phone rings and a young person's voice on the other end claiming to be your grandson says he's been arrested in Spain and needs you to send money by Western Union? You ask him why his voice sounds funny, why he hasn't called his parents, and why he is in Spain. He tells you he is calling from jail, and the phone has a bad connection. He flew to Spain on a quick trip with friends and didn't want his father to know what he has done, but he really needs help fast for bail and an attorney so that he can get the charges dropped and his passport returned. "Please, Nana, send me \$20,000 fast. There are people in here who are scaring me!"

DON'T DO AS REQUESTED! Before going to the bank, call your grandson's phone number or his parents and ask where he is. Chances are he is at his college studying hard for the final exams in a few days. Investigate first; don't become the next "How I was scammed" news story.

In the past of couple months, phishing scams have risen to a new level of genius. Hackers are breaking into Citi Corporation's computers, stealing customer account information; hacking into Defense Contractors' computers, stealing national secrets; even hacking into Sony's game software, stealing credit card info and crashing its systems.

In late May, Trend Micro discovered a vulnerability in Hotmail that could compromise a user's account just by previewing an e-mail. Without anyone clicking on an attachment or fully opening the e-mail, the malicious messages, specifically crafted for individual targets, triggered a script that could steal e-mail messages and contact information and forward new messages to another account. Microsoft has already patched this vulnerability. Phishers were using a vulnerability in Microsoft protocol to analyze the user's antivirus software. That way the attackers could tailor their code to avoid detection and take over the victim's computer.

The old advice about how to decide if an incoming e-mail is legit was to look for poor spelling or grammatical errors to determine the trustworthiness of the e-mail's source. Even though this advice still applies to most scam or phishing e-mail, the other day, I received one that appeared to have been written by a college English professor, perfectly written in every way with only a couple of red flags. First, it was addressed to "Undisclosed Recipients," and second, it was requesting me to reply with personal information such as my name, address, telephone number, gender and age. Since it was sent to me, offering a very lucrative business opportunity, one would assume that the sender should have already known this information.

Aside from using antivirus software to sniff out attacks, if you click on an external link, pay attention to the URL. The page may look as though it belongs to Google, Yahoo or Microsoft, but the Web address will tell the truth. If you suspect an attack has occurred, check your e-mail settings to see if "your computer" is forwarding e-mails independently to other addresses, e-mails that you did not originate. Be suspicious of all incoming e-mails. Even if they come from friends, there's a chance that their computers could have been compromised in all recent phishing attacks. Your computer's best defense against attackers is you, so think first before responding.

Kramer

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Budget Approved. The FY 2011-2012 budget was passed at the June 14 Board of Commissioners' (BOC) meeting. If you are on my e-mail list, you should have received it by now. It is also available on the town's Web site, www.townofpks.com.

Mimosa Bridge Update. Our engineering firm has notified us that the construction of the bridge could be delayed for administrative reasons. The BOC is not agreeable to this. There will be more to follow after we meet with the engineers and North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT).

Sidewalks. There is potential for delay on our sidewalk project as well. NCDOT is requiring Pine Knoll Shores to hire separate engineering firms for design and for construction administration. This potentially could be cost prohibitive. I will update you when we have a solution.

Next Dinner with the Mayor. Our next dinner with Mayor Ken Jones will be on Saturday July 16, at 5:30 p.m. This will be our third such event held on a Saturday evening in the summer. The intent is to reach out to our weekenders/second homeowners who are not always available the rest of the year. The location will be Milazzo's, the Italian Restaurant next to the Sheraton in Atlantic Beach.

PKS's First Intern. If you have the opportunity, please come to town hall and welcome Scott Sherrill. Scott is a graduate student at UNC-Chapel Hill and is working with us this summer as an intern. He is tackling everything from a dune ordinance to recycling. Scott is a graduate of Davidson College and is halfway through his master of public administration degree at UNC. The mayor and commissioners have decided on a nickname already, so please come by and say hello to "Sparky."

