Tight Housing Makes Kodiak Prime Real Estate for Scammers

Friday, 20 July 2012

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

With the housing market in Kodiak being so tight and rents so extremely high, a seemingly good deal could turn into an international financial nightmare.

It looks like overseas scammers are targeting Alaska's toughest housing market by impersonating the owners of buildings for sale and rent in Kodiak at very low prices. So low in fact that one ad on Craigslist prompted a local man to alert local real estate agent Bob Brodie that it may be a scam - which it was: The scammer asked many personal questions and for cash to be wired to her. In this case the scammer asked for $2,200, which was for one month's rent and a refundable security deposit.

Having seen something like this before, Brodie contacted Police Chief T.C. Kamai.

"We did a little bit of research and determined it was an actual scam," Kamai said. "It's not anything new. It's something that's been on the radar since about 2008, 2009, and the best we can tell it's a variation of the Nigerian letter scam, if you're familiar with that."

The so-called "owner" of the house on Rezanof near the middle school said in an e-mail that they had been transferred to Madrid, Spain, on business, and just wanted someone to take care of the place. The Craigslist offering listed the three-bedroom, two-bath house, with all utilities included, for the low-low price of $1,100 per month. The poor syntax and punctuation of the scammer's e-mail was the first clue there was something amiss, but it was the smokin' hot deal that really rang the alarm bells.

"Exactly, and that's what our concern was. As most folks know it can be really tough to find a place to rent in this town these days," the chief said. "A good deal like that might entice some people to follow through. This was an opportunity to educate the public and we don't want to have anyone lose their money on the scams, so we wanted to make them aware of it."

Brodie said in an e-mail that he has seen several homes that are legitimately for sale or rent in Kodiak used in Craigslist scams like this. He said the scammers must be pretty sophisticated to research homes for sale in a small town like Kodiak, and then put area-specific ads on Craigslist.