

“Opening a Can of Worms”

Human Services Spotlight Series #13

A Pinellas County resident contacted Pinellas County Consumer Protection after she had problems with a business she contracted with to build a 15' x 15' screened patio to include a roof, flooring, and engineered plans at her home for a total of \$15,222. The resident also contracted with the business to install insulation in her attic for an additional \$4,186 that included a “special new material” guaranteed to retard rodents and insects. The consumer asked the business if they were licensed and insured, which they assured her they were but failed to provide any paperwork, only stating they have been in business for many years.

The resident obtained a loan and, in all, provided the business with \$18,686. The screened room was installed, but according to the resident, it was installed poorly. The materials were below standard, the flooring was installed below the foundation causing flooding during rain, the room leaked throughout because it was not squared, live wires were left exposed and hanging, light fixtures were never installed, and sharp aluminum edges were found throughout the room causing a safety hazard to the resident and her pets, all rendering the room useless.

Although the consumer complained to the business, they refused to correct the issues without being paid additional money. In addition, the business threatened to call code enforcement on the consumer stating, “she would be opening a can of worms” if she proceeded with her complaint.

The consumer turned to Pinellas County Consumer Protection for help and because of Pinellas County Consumer Protection’s efforts, the owner of the business was charged criminally with failure to secure workers compensation, grand theft from person 65 years of age or older, and unlicensed contracting. He was sentenced to sixty months probation and to pay \$18,686 in restitution to the consumer. Two co-defendants involved in this job were also charged and ordered to pay \$2,000 each in restitution.

Protect

Regulate

Investigate

Educate

Sometimes, it is hard to spot fraud when it is happening. Scams can be large or small, sophisticated or simple, but the people behind them have two things in common: they want to steal your money and avoid being caught. The reality is anyone could fall victim to a scam, no matter your age, intellect or economic status. Most consumer transactions are completed satisfactorily. On occasion, however, any consumer could experience unresolved problems such as defective products, erroneous bills or non-delivery of goods or services.

When you are confronted with such a situation, the dedicated employees of Pinellas County Consumer Protection are here to assist you. Investigators are available to speak with you regarding a consumer transaction at (727) 464-6200.

www.pinellascounty.org/consumer



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