

Brian Trainor

Reader's Digest and ICBC?

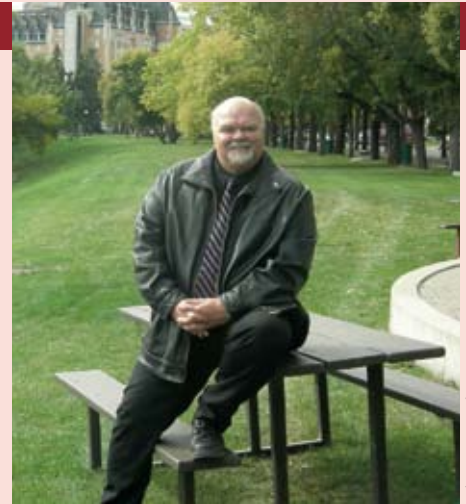


Photo Credit: Joanne Trainor*

What pops into your head when you hear *Reader's Digest* and Publisher's Clearing House?

A sweepstakes contest, right? We all are familiar with the television commercials where a band of well-dressed merrymakers descends upon the winner's house to present him with a cheque for millions of dollars. He has won the contest! It's real—and there's the proof.

As the Community Resource Consultant for the Saskatoon-based FirstSask Credit Union, one of my roles is to investigate matters of financial concern for our members, ranging from telephone scams to mail frauds announcing they've won the El Gordo lottery. I use my police investigative techniques, honed in 27 years as a police officer, to expose these scams for what they are, thereby saving our members money.

One such scam came to my attention recently. I knew it would be of interest to all my good friends at The Society of Notaries Public of BC.

A member of FirstSask gave me a copy of a letter he received in the mail. It stated he had won \$150,000 in a *Reader's Digest*/Publisher's Clearing House draw. Enclosed in the envelope was a cheque for \$4950 made out in his name. He was asked to cash this cheque and wire \$3950 back to Pacific America Financial,

to cover legal and administrative fees. He could keep the remaining thousand dollars as an advance on his winnings.

The cheque was real. But a few things caught my eye.

- Why was the cheque from ICBC? I knew ICBC was the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia. Why would ICBC be issuing a cheque for *Reader's Digest* in a sweepstakes draw?

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I phoned ICBC and spoke to their Special Investigations Unit.

- The cheque had been stolen.
- And it had been washed and reissued without ICBC's consent or knowledge. In police lingo, washing a cheque means removing the payee's name and replacing it with another name.
- I could see the amount was also changed, to \$4950, from the original amount.

The lesson here is that if you had not entered the sweepstakes, you could not have won the prize. Unexpected cheques in the mail should cause concern. If you get one, email me. I can help.

In this instance, had the member deposited the cheque and wired the

money as requested, not only would he have been out the money, he would have owed the credit union the \$4950, once the cheque came back as bogus.

WARNING * WARNING * WARNING

A huge tip in these scams is "wire transfer." When a letter, an email, or a phone caller tells you to wire money and you don't know the individual personally, chances are great that it's a scam. Wired money can be picked up anywhere in the world. All the receiver needs is the tracking number—which you would provide to him, after you send the money.

You may think you are sending money to Tampa, Florida, for a cute purebred puppy when, in fact, the thief is collecting your wire transfer in a pawn shop in London, England, using a fake Italian passport as ID. I speak from police experience in that matter because I investigated just such a fraud. And there was no puppy. ▲

Sgt. Brian Trainor retired to pursue his passion of providing fraud education to the masses. As FirstSask Credit Union's Community Resource Consultant, he presents public lectures locally and nationally on a variety of fraud topics. He is author of the book, *STOP FRAUD*.

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* The building in the background is the Delta Bessborough Hotel, a Saskatoon landmark.