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SPORT



The Maryborough District Advertiser

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**QUICK-FIRE**

The rapid actions of local brigades and residents has been strongly commended after getting a Carisbrook blaze under control during Tuesday's extreme fire danger conditions. Story, Page 11.

300126 19

VINDICATION

Scammed resident who thought money was gone wins case after 16 months

JONATHAN PECK

Sixteen months of fighting and advocacy while suffering from the emotional trauma of losing a "life-changing" amount of money to a malicious scam has all been vindicated for Carisbrook resident Danny McIver, with an independent authority ruling that his money be refunded.

On the morning of September 17, 2024, an

innocuous pop-up on Mr McIver's computer went on to change his life forever.

Suddenly in a state of panic, Mr McIver called the number on the screen claiming to be Microsoft support to repair his "hacked" computer.

In the ensuing phone call, scammers gained remote access to the computer, obtained the password to his Bendigo Bank account and made four successful withdrawals before

the bank intervened and froze the account just as the scammers attempted another transaction.

With his sickening suspicions of the situation coming to pasture, Mr McIver said the traumatic experience caused immeasurable damage to himself and close family members like his granddaughter, who was present during the incident.

"It really had a big effect on my personal

relationships, especially with my granddaughter, because after it happened she absolutely believed that it was her fault that Papa lost his money," he said.

"It's affected my health, no doubt. I'm not the same person I was, so I can understand how it affects people and understand how people take their lives, it's that big of a deal."

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Budget**VACC****RACV**

Scam victim gets money back

Continued from Front Page

Within an hour of the scam's aftermath, Mr McIver called Computer Coaching's Jeremy Thomas for advice.

Having numerous experiences dealing with ombudsmen in the telecommunications industry and after completing damage control on the compromised devices, Mr Thomas said he was emboldened to champion Mr McIver's cause, fueled by compassion for his friend's predicament.

"I saw Danny living with this every day, hanging over his head and playing on his mind. It can't be understated how devastating this is to people, and Danny's just one of many, many people this happens to," he said.

"How can you not empathise with his plight, and if you can help, why wouldn't you."

"I felt for his situation that if I wasn't going to stand up for him and be an advocate for the truth, then I felt that he would never see his money again."

Following an unsuccessful recovery application to Bendigo Bank, the pair took their case to the Australian Financial Complaints Authority (AFCA), believing the bank hadn't done enough to protect Mr McIver's account.

"AFCA is like any ombudsman. They are an adjudicator, so they asked us both to present the facts and case," Mr Thomas said.

"When you go to AFCA, it's not a case of judging a case on its merits. It's a case of judging it by the various

laws and terms and conditions under which the bank has to function.

"The bank had to find a reason under those specific terms and conditions or governing laws, they can say 'we absolve ourselves of responsibility'.

"I was confident because, upon initial investigations, I was able to get all of this evidence and piece together the story of what I had seen and not what I had thought had happened.

"I didn't feel at any point that the banks were emotive about it, I did feel like they weren't taking all of the facts into consideration and it was more of a case of they were there to achieve an objective.

"It wasn't nasty in any way, but it was extremely dismissive and that in itself disconnects them from the human cost of this."

Following several months of deliberation with AFCA, the closest the pair had come to receiving salvation was when the bank offered \$5000 in compensation.

With no end in sight as the harrowing situation continued to unravel, Mr McIver said he routinely considered throwing in the towel.

"I had a feeling pretty much every day that this wasn't going to happen," he said.

"Jeremy made sure that I kept positive, I would get some message from AFCA, and I would ring Jeremy and say 'mate, I think we are buggered', and he would go 'no we're not', and turn it into a positive

and keep me going.

"If I didn't have Jeremy behind me, keeping me balanced, I might have done something stupid.

"People reached out and gave advice, and something that was consistent across that was the persistence."

That persistence finally paid off when AFCA told the pair the bank was unable to satisfy AFCA's requirement to provide evidence that they weren't liable for the incident.

In a case of pure happenstance or holiday magic, Mr McIver officially received word the money would be refunded on Christmas Eve last year, a festive miracle beyond his wildest dreams.

"I was at a friend's place and the lady who Jeremy and I were dealing with from AFCA called and I'd been waiting for a call for a long time," Mr McIver said.

"When they rang, I said 'I thought you forgotten about me' and they said 'no way I would've forgotten about you, in fact I have some good news'.

"I was starting to think and then they said the ombudsman has ruled in your favour and they said they have given the bank seven days to be in touch.

"I got a message from the bank saying they had processed it, and on the evening of the 24th, I looked in my bank account and there it was."

The ruling brought a whirlwind of emotions for Mr McIver, who urges fellow residents not to fall into the same traps as he did.

"I know I am dying and I don't have a long time left, but I want to leave my family enough money to continue living the same lifestyle we are now," he said.

"Without that money, I was never going to be able to do that."

"My message is that if anything ever happens on your phone and your computer, don't act straight away."

"What I want to get across to people is to wait your time out, don't do anything silly, get somebody behind you as I have with Jeremy and keep your faith."

Mr Thomas echoed Mr McIver's advice, instructing residents to remain mindful of the constant threat of scams.

"There's a little bit of a taboo around scams. People feel embarrassed that they have let their guard down," he said.

"The best thing I can say is try to swallow your pride and say something doesn't add up, get some help and that will at least get the dialogue started."

"These scammers prey on the ignorance of the people at the other end, so a little bit of knowledge can help alleviate the ignorance that leaves us vulnerable."

"The key is trying to stop and break down the chains of events before they get worse by listening to your intuition. It's ok to stop, take a minute, and collect your thoughts."



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Slow down for school zones



School zones are back in force around the state this week as students return to class for term one. School zones generally operate between 8 to 9.30 am, and 2.30 to 4 pm on week days and require drivers to slow down to 40 km/h.



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