

Break Your Heart, Not the Bank

By Roy Niedermayer

“Only the lonely know the way I feel tonight” – scammed and embarrassed.

“There goes my money; there goes my heart; they’re gone forever; so far apart.” Valentine’s Day may be over but the romance scammers never rest.

Feeling elderly and lonely? Unexpectedly there is a Facebook friend invite from another lonely person. They are nice. They are friendly. You exchange pictures. They express interest in you and your life. They make you feel lovable and likable again.

But beware. After a while they start to ask favors, followed by a little money for broken cellphones or credit card debt. Then it’s more for car repairs and medical crises. Before it stops, your losses may total thousands of dollars.

Last year lonely-hearts reported losing \$143 million to romance-related scams—more than any other elder abuse scam reported to the Federal Trade Commission. The median loss of persons ages 70 and older was \$10,000, with some reports of losses of \$100,000 or more. Some elders even take out home equity loans and new credit cards. And much of this goes unreported due to embarrassment.

So the next time you get a friend message from another lonely person seeking someone to talk to, talk and comfort them – but stay just pen pals.