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Scam Artists Pose As Locksmiths

by Joel Thomas

NORTH TEXAS (CBS 11 News) — "I saw the 'anytime, anywhere' and I needed them now," said Annette Bell of Haltom City as she looked at the torn page from the phone book.

It read: 24-hour locksmith. Available within 15 minutes. And it seemed legitimate enough.

Annette Bell needed someone in a hurry to replace the locks on a [storage](#) area someone had broken into. What she didn't need was a scam artist.

Their ad looks legit, but investigators say its part of a large scam run out of New York.

The person who responded to Bell's call was mangling her door handle as he told her his rates would be three times higher than he quoted.

When Bell refused to pay he tried to barge his way inside the storage area where Bell stood.

"I had my foot right here trying to keep him out or me in or something," said Bell as she placed her foot at the door's sill. "When he wouldn't leave after the third time I said, 'That's it. You're leaving.' And my heart was starting to race then. That's when I got mean back. I had to protect me."

He finally left when she started dialing 9-1-1.

In Dallas there was a very similar add but different phone numbers. This time the [homeowners](#) got a few improperly changed doorknobs and a bill for three-thousand dollars.

The Department of Public [Safety](#) arrested one man apparently running a similar scam. Like others in the larger operation, he has ties to the Middle East, in this case Israel.

But investigators say the operation is so widespread as soon as one operative is taken off the streets another takes his place.

"I've been in contact with approximately seven or eight other states who've been in contact with this same group of individuals," said Kent Paluga with the Texas D.P.S.

Bell says other victims may not escape like she did.

"They're going to get hurt or taken advantage of and that cannot happen. I'm not real big on people taking advantage of elderly people."

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