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## Some 'Local' Locksmiths Turn Out To Be Cheats

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### **Amy Clancy**

KIRO 7 Eyewitness News

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Dan Schultz first alerted KIRO 7 to the problem after he locked himself out of his Seattle home as he was taking his two young children to school.

So, with kids in tow, he ran to his neighbor's house, Googled "locksmith, Seattle," and his zip code, and up came a number of apparently local locksmiths, with local addresses and phone numbers.

"The nearest address I found was 155th and Aurora," he told Clancy.

Schultz called the locksmith he believed was just around the corner who quoted a price of \$65 to get into his home. But when the worker arrived, he quoted a different price.

"He said that it would cost \$113 to pick the lock. And at that point, it was sort of a bad morning turned worse," Schultz remembers.

But it would get even worse. The job became even more expensive when Schultz didn't have enough cash on-hand.

"He said that they would accept any major credit card, but that there would be an extra fee on top of the \$188 that I owed him. So at that point I said, '\$188? I thought you said it was \$113!'"

Because Schultz didn't want to pay extra to use a credit card, he said the locksmith suggested they drive to an ATM for cash. Schultz complied, withdrew \$200 and handed it over expecting around \$12 in change.

"I gave him the \$200 and he gave me \$2 back," said Schultz.

On top of the high price, Schultz said the worker didn't pick his lock but drilled a hole destroying the lock, leaving Schultz to replace it -- all for \$198.

Schultz called the company to complain, with no resolution. Had he wanted to confront the owner in person, it would have been very difficult because the "nearby" address for the so-called "local" locksmith is not a locksmith business at all, but a now-closed pizza restaurant.

KIRO 7 Consumer Investigators did an online search to see how common it is for so-called "local" locksmiths to use someone else's address.

We found a supposed locksmith business in Greenwood is actually an upholstery store. A Belltown-area locksmith is really a restaurant. We also tracked down locksmith companies that claim to work out of a downtown Seattle pizza place, a cafe in the International District, an auto repair shop, and a rural field in Bonney Lake.

Jesse Black of the Northwest Locksmith Association said you'll find the same problem looking for a locksmith in the phone book.

"We've got two and a half pages of just straight lines and addresses. Every one is a different phone number, every one of them rings through to New Jersey," Black claims.

Black works for Nyberg Locksmiths in Seattle, which has been in business since 1921. He said the company has received a number of complaints recently from consumers who called what they thought was a Nyberg number, because the address listed was Nyberg's Third Avenue address. The technicians who responded even claimed to work for Nyberg. But in one case, Black said, a consumer was charged \$300 after his door was kicked in when the so-called Nyberg "locksmith" couldn't pick it.

"This to me is the absolute lowest of the low, to be honest with you," Black told Clancy. "They use legitimate locksmiths' addresses in an attempt to dupe people into thinking they're actually getting Nyberg out to their store. These guys, they're not legitimate locksmiths."

Black fears the trend could put properly trained locksmiths out of business.

Washington State Attorney General Rob McKenna is also concerned. "When they use false addresses, when they lie about their presence locally, people are deceived," McKenna told Clancy. "That ought to be expressly illegal."

But in this state, while consumers could claim using phony addresses is "deceptive", it's not explicitly illegal. So directories publish these bogus addresses all the time, for many different industries, not just the locksmith business.

McKenna said he'd like to see a state legislator work on passing a law that would prevent such false advertising. The Northwest Locksmith Association tells Clancy it's working on that in time for the next legislative session in January. The Northwest Locksmith Association is also working to require a state license or certification for locksmiths.

Currently, no official licensing is necessary.

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