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By Conor Powers-Smith
csmith@wickedlocal.com

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Scammed Yarmouth vet finds support from community

When a man rang the doorbell of Andrew Dolan's South Yarmouth home, offering to take care of some yard work, Dolan, a 92-year-old veteran of World War II with limited mobility, agreed. "The grass needed cutting, and of course I can't do anything like that, so I said okay," Dolan said.

The man soon found other jobs that needed doing around Dolan's home, offering to take care of them all at relatively low cost, so long as the money was paid up front. The price tag eventually reached into the thousands of dollars.

The man seemed busy enough, but Dolan, unable to keep an eye on him as he moved around the house, or to inspect the work he claimed to have done, thought another pair of eyes was called for.

"Andy called me about going over there to take a look at a leak in his basement," said David Fellows, Dolan's neighbor. By then, the handyman's visits to Dolan's house had become less frequent.

"I got suspicious, because I didn't see anyone working," said Fellows. The results of the supposed hard work weren't in evidence, either; a new window the man claimed to have installed in an upstairs room turned out to be a pure fabrication, and the whole property was in disarray.

Fellows contacted the police. The supposed handyman turned out to be Mark Higgins, well known to Yarmouth police for soliciting odd jobs from elderly residents, collecting their money, and disappearing without completing the work.

Police suggested Fellows lure Higgins back to Dolan's house, so they could execute several outstanding warrants against him, and arrest him for his latest swindle. Fellows agreed, and got in contact with Higgins, urging him to return, if only to clean up the damage he had done in simulating work.

"It took a while, phone calls back and forth," said Fellows. "We kind of set up a little sting on him. I ended up getting him back here."

When Higgins appeared, police were stationed nearby, awaiting a prearranged signal. "The cops were waiting right around the corner," Fellows said. "All I did was hit my cell phone, send—I didn't say anything—and they came flying around the corner."

Although glad Higgins had been arrested, Dolan didn't expect to recover the money he'd already paid him, especially when the scammer disappeared before he could stand trial. "I knew I was never going to get any money back," Dolan said. "So I forgot it."

The story might have ended there, if Dolan's case hadn't come to the attention of YPD Sgt. Robert Warren, a member of the Cape Community Business Partners. The small group of local businesspeople chooses three or four Cape residents in need of assistance each year, and donates its members' time, expertise, and materials to the task.

The group was looking for a candidate at the time, and Warren, who owns the contracting business Northside Home Improvement, put the word out to the rest of the YPD. Officer Rick Fichter mentioned Dolan's case, which struck a chord with Warren. "I felt bad for the guy, and it kind of reminded me of my father, because my father was the same age," Warren said.

The CCBP usually tries to help children, the elderly, or veterans, and Dolan—who landed in France on D-Day—fit the bill. When Warren offered the suggestion, the rest of the group enthusiastically agreed. "I presented it to them, and they were very, very excited," he said. "They wanted to go out and do it that day."

A few members visited Dolan's house to inspect the damage Higgins had caused, and other issues in need of looking after. A few days later, the group appeared in force, around 20 members setting aside four hours of their Saturdays to reseed Dolan's lawn, remove old bushes and trees—including one that was threatening the house's roof—and plant new ones in their places, power wash the house's exterior, completely clean it inside, build a new fence, and replace the gutters, along with rotten boards beneath.

"They didn't fool around," said Dolan. "I couldn't believe it at first...We were expecting them to do some work, but not to that extent."

Watching from next door, Fellows was glad to see some actual work being done on the property. "I think that's a great thing they did over there," he said. "It's awesome."

"When you put it all together, it's probably 15 to 20 thousand dollars' worth of work," said Warren, adding that, rather than shying away from the overhaul, CCBP members were happy to have a project large enough to accommodate everyone who wanted to help. "The hardest part we have is, sometimes the jobs that we do aren't big enough to have everyone there."

Warren said members of the group view its two main objectives—networking among local businesspeople, and lending assistance to those in need—as inseparable. "To me, it's an obligation of a businessperson to support the community," he said. "Our motto is, 'Doing good for the community.'"



Members of the CCBP work on Dolan's home and lawn. Photo courtesy CCBP

Dolan said the good done at his home is undeniable, and highly appreciated. “It looked pretty sorry around here for a while, but after Saturday, it looks great.”

Cape Community Business Partners

The CCBP, a group of about 25 people from small, medium, and large Cape businesses, is always looking for new members. Business owners and employees are welcome. Members share information and advice from their professions with the rest of the group, and contribute time, energy, and materials to Cape residents in need.

The CCBP meets each Wednesday evening at the Hyannis Golf Course, 1840 Iyannough Road #2, from 7 to around 8. Prospective members, or anyone interested in learning more about the group, are always welcome to attend.

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