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Tropical Costa Rica

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■ TODAY'S VERSE

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (NIV)

HONEST HOOSIER



It's time for Friday night lights again. So happy to see football back and better than ever!

■ QUOTE OF THE DAY

"You don't drown by falling in water; you drown by staying there."
- Robert Collier

■ JOKE OF THE DAY

Why do you never see a mummy on summer vacation?

They don't want to unwind.

The TIMES

NOBLESVILLE, INDIANA

www.THETIMES24-7.com | 50¢

■ BOOMER BITS RETIREMENT

Why Hasn't My SS Benefit Changed Because I am Still Working?



ASK RUSTY
Social Security Advisor

Dear Rusty: I am currently receiving Social Security benefits while continuing to work full time. There are no restrictions on my wage earnings because I waited until full retirement age before beginning benefits. However, I was also told that my benefit amount would be reviewed each year if my current earnings were higher than past earnings. That held true for the first two years but has yet to be adjusted for 2025. I thought it might be because of HR 82, which does not impact me directly, but I think it may be the reason my payment has not yet been changed. Has enough time passed so I should contact SSA now to see if this is the

case? Signed: Waiting Anxiously

Dear Waiting: If you are already collecting benefits, Social Security reviews your earnings each year to see if your more recent earnings are high enough to warrant an increase in your monthly benefit. They do this automatically, after they get your most recent earnings data from the IRS, and they typically do that review by the end of the 3rd quarter of each year. If a higher benefit is indicated, they will increase your monthly amount and pay you retroactively to the beginning of the year for any difference in your benefit.

SSA has, indeed, been vigorously working on changes

See RUSTY Page 2

■ BOOMER BITS TECHNOLOGY

4 Common AI Travel Scams and How to Avoid Them

It's an unfortunate truth that the travel industry has always been a prime target for scammers. And with the rapid advancement of AI technology, con artists have found new, more sophisticated ways to deceive unsuspecting travelers. Through the use of AI, scammers are now able to create highly convincing fake travel booking websites, phishing emails, and even voice impersonations, all designed to steal travelers' personal and financial information.

If you are planning an upcoming trip, it's crucial to understand the latest AI-powered travel scams and how to protect yourself. As the Chief Information Officer at SlickTrip (a popular flight

price drop website), I have seen firsthand how rapidly these scams are evolving and how much they can wreak havoc on travelers' lives. Below are 4 of the most common AI-driven threats targeting travelers today, the red flags to watch for, and what to do if you find yourself caught in one.

AI-Generated Deepfake Customer Service Agents

One of the most alarming scams is the use of AI-generated voices to create deepfake customer service representatives. Scammers use advanced voice synthesis to mimic the voices of real airline or hotel employees. They call unsuspecting trav-

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■ BOOMER BITS BUSINESS

BBB Scam Alert: Shopping for Latest Hot Toy?

If you're on the hunt for the latest hot toy, watch for fake websites and counterfeit products when shopping online.

Scammers often take note of current trends and pop up with websites and offers that seem too good to be

true. Unfortunately, consumers are falling for their tricks.

It seems like everyone is trying to get their hands on the latest trending toy, the Labubu. Scammers are taking notice and selling counterfeit merchandise or creating fake websites with no real products to

sell.

BBB Scam Tracker has 71 reports and counting from people who thought they were purchasing authentic Labubus, but they turned out to be counterfeit, or they didn't receive anything at all.

Several consumers have shared their experiences on BBB Scam Tracker:

"This company marketed on sites like TikTok stating that they are a confirmed site and seller for Labubus. I placed an order for my daughter's birth-

day thinking I found a legitimate seller. To my surprise the site no longer exists; I only found this out after a month had passed without me receiving my purchased items..."

"I purchased 6 items

See LABUBU Page 3

■ THREE THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

1. Calling future nurses: Marian University and Ascension St. Vincent are looking for you. The university's Leighton School of Nursing and Ascension St. Vincent will showcase the many pathways in a burgeoning field and the opportunities to give back to the greater good at a free event on Aug. 27 from 4-7 p.m. in the main lobby of Ascension St. Vincent's Women and Infants Hospital, 2001 W. 86th St., Door 4A, in Indianapolis. This event is for anyone interested in nursing at any level — from high schoolers to career changers— to help current and future nurses find their calling while filling the ongoing need for healthcare professionals in Indiana.

2. Indianapolis resident Tyler Baumann caught a 9-ounce mooneye on the East Fork of the Whitewater River on June 5 in Dearborn County, beating the previous record of 5.8 ounces set in 2019 on the Ohio River in Clark County. Baumann caught the 12-inch-long state record fish from a kayak using a night crawler under a bobber. State record fish are determined by weight rather than length. Mooneye are found in large rivers throughout Indiana. Mooneye and goldeye look similar and are often mistaken for one or the other. To differentiate between the two, look at where the dorsal fin starts in comparison to the anal fin. For mooneye, the start of the dorsal fin is either before or in line with the start of the anal fin. For goldeye, the start of the dorsal fin is behind the start of the anal fin.

3. Indiana Landmarks recently announced the 10 Most Endangered, an annual list of Hoosier landmarks in jeopardy: College Hall, Merom Camp & Retreat Center, Merom; Emily Kimbrough Historic District, Muncie; Kiwanis Field, La Porte; Mineral Springs Hotel, Paoli; Rudicel-Montgomery Polygonal Barn, Waldron; Shields Memorial Gymnasium, Seymour; Sollman School, Snake Run (near Fort Branch); Sposeep & Sons Building, Wabash; Traders Point Covered Bridge, Indianapolis; and West Side Recreation Club, South Bend. Places that land on the 10 Most Endangered list often face a combination of problems rather than a single threat—abandonment, neglect, dilapidation, obsolete use, development pressure, or owners who simply lack money for repairs. Since the list was introduced in 1991, demolition has claimed only 21 of the 172 Most Endangered sites, while 105 places are completely restored or no longer endangered. To find out more about each of the 10 Most Endangered, visit www.indianalandmarks.org.

HAMILTON HAPPENINGS

Tomorrow, from noon to 5 p.m., the Humane Society for Hamilton County takes part in the 11th annual Clear the Shelters adoption event. With nearly 600 animals in need of adoption, HSHC will do whatever it takes to make sure these animals can live, love, and be loved. For one day only, adoption fees will be reduced to just \$10, giving families the perfect chance to welcome a new pet into their homes (some exclusions apply). All adoptions include a free spay/neuter, microchip, one round of age-appropriate vaccinations/deworming, a wellness exam at a participating veterinarian, and a starter bag of food.

SCAM

Continued from Page 1

elers posing as legitimate customer support agents, often using publicly available information or previous data breaches to make their calls seem authentic. The goal? To trick travelers into divulging sensitive information such as booking references, credit card numbers, or even login credentials to loyalty programs.

Because these AI voices sound incredibly realistic, many victims do not suspect a thing until it's too late. To protect yourself, first always verify the caller's identity by asking for their official employee ID or calling back through official contact numbers found on verified websites. Also, never share payment information or passwords over the phone unless you initiated the call and are certain of the recipient's identity. Finally, use two-factor authentication (2FA) on your travel and payment accounts to add an extra layer of security.

AI-Generated Phishing Emails Mimicking Booking Confirmations

Email phishing attacks have become much more sophisticated with the help of AI. For example, scammers now use AI to generate emails that are almost indistinguishable from legitimate booking confirmations or notifications from airlines, hotels, or travel agencies. These emails can include the company's actual logos, brand colors, and writing styles, making them seem incredibly trustworthy at a glance. However, they contain malicious links or attachments designed to steal your credit card details, install malware on your device, and more.

To prevent an AI-generated phishing email scam, there are several main warning signs to keep in mind. First, look out for any slight grammatical errors or sentences that are phrased awkwardly in an email or SMS message, even if the rest of the message looks polished. Legitimate emails and messages from real travel booking companies will be free of these kinds of errors. Another red flag is a request to click on links or download attachments unexpectedly. On top of this, another red flag is the email urging immediate action or threatening consequences to provoke a quick, unthinking response.

To stay safe from these kinds of scams, make sure to cross-check booking details by logging into the airline or hotel's official website directly, rather than clicking links in an email. Also, hover over links to verify the URL before clicking. Does it

lead to the company's real domain? If not, it can be a scam. Finally, use email spam filters and security software to detect phishing attempts.

Fake Booking Websites Created by AI

One widespread AI-enabled scam in the travel industry is the creation of fake booking websites for hotels, car rentals, flights, and travel packages. By leveraging AI, con artists can quickly build and launch these sites with realistic images, reviews, and pricing designed to lure travelers into making bookings. These websites look so professional and convincing that many travelers believe they're legitimate. And once payment is made, the scammer disappears with the money, leaving the traveler without a reservation or any way to contact customer service.

To avoid falling victim to a fake booking website, first ensure that you always book directly through well-known official websites or trusted travel platforms. Also, double-check the website URL for minor misspellings or unusual domain names. For example, a fake website might end in .net instead of .com. Also, look for secure connections ([https://]https://) and trust seals, but be aware these can sometimes be faked. As an added precaution, search for reviews or complaints about the website on independent forums or consumer review sites.

AI-Generated WhatsApp or SMS "Urgent Alerts"

Travelers are also being targeted via AI-generated text messages sent through WhatsApp, SMS, or other messaging platforms. These messages appear to be urgent airline or travel updates, such as flight delays, cancellations, or gate changes. Scammers use these fake alerts to trick travelers into clicking on malicious links that can lead to phishing sites or malware downloads. And because these alerts create a sense of urgency, travelers may act without thinking, which puts their sensitive information or devices at risk.

To prevent this scam, first look out for unexpected messages from unknown numbers or contacts. Also, check to see if the messages contain spelling mistakes or awkward phrasing. It is also a scam if a link in the message does not lead to the official airline or travel company's site. Avoid clicking on any links in messages unless you are certain of the sender's authenticity. Make sure to also verify any urgent travel information directly on the

airline's official app or website. Finally, enable message filtering on your phone to block spam or suspicious messages.

What Red Flags Should Consumers Watch For? Spotting scams early can save you a lot of trouble. As stated above, one key warning sign to be alert for is grammatical errors or awkward phrasing in a message. Even if the email or message looks polished, small mistakes can indicate a scam. It is also a scam if you are faced with unusual payment requests. For example, are you asked to pay via gift cards, direct bank transfers, or cryptocurrency? Legitimate companies won't ask for payment via these methods. Another big red flag is an inability to verify a booking on the official airline or hotel website after providing confirmation details.

Other red flags are chatbots asking for private info too soon. Real companies typically avoid requesting sensitive information through automated chat systems and will connect you to a human agent if needed. Finally, assess whether an email or message is using pressure tactics and urgent language, because Scammers often create a false sense of urgency to rush victims into making mistakes.

What Should You Do If You're Fooled by an AI Travel Scam?

The first thing to do is immediately contact your bank to freeze and/or dispute the transactions. It is also important to report the scam to your local consumer protection agency and the FTC (in the U.S.). Filing a report will help protect other travelers, support investigations, and prevent con artists from targeting more victims. Also, make sure to change your passwords if you were tricked into sharing your login credentials for your bank account, email account, etc. I also recommend contacting the real airline/hotel you wanted to book with to alert them of the scam that is taking place and to confirm your actual booking status

After taking these steps, continue to monitor your financial and travel accounts for any unusual activity.

Jeremy Greenburg is the Chief Information Officer at SlickTrip, an online platform that instantly compares top travel sites and alerts you the moment flight prices drop. In his role, Greenburg educates others on travel trends, travel tech innovation, and real-time data systems.

Indy Has New Fabufantastic Museum

Dick Wolfsie
Columnist

"Indianapolis doesn't have a bad reputation; it has no reputation," says retired award-winning Indianapolis Star writer Will Higgins. He's only half kidding, which means he is half right. According to Will, the quirky, eccentric stories about his home city have never been really celebrated. Higgins learned of some of these untold tales by listening to old-time reporters back in the 90s as they recounted their experiences tracking down stories. "We've got a freaky cultural history and I want to tell it," Higgins proclaims.

The result is the Museum of Fabulosity on the southeast side of Indy in the Garfield Park area. The exhibit is part of a contemporary art museum called the Tube Factory, 1125 Cruft Street. The neighborhood is dotted with charming businesses like a tattoo parlor, a vintage clothing store, a retro kind of hardware store and coffee shops.

Inside Will's space are some 16 displays that reflect the cheeky history of the Circle City. As you enter the museum, a myriad of "props" draws your attention to stories that Will has written in his inimitable style. For example, the pole in the corner of the room is not the actual pole that Mauri Rose Kirby sat atop of back in 1958. for almost

a year as part of a restaurant promotion, but the story is true, all 71 feet of it. While the artifacts are not authentic, they direct you to the stories that chronicle a rich history of unconventional and unusual Hoosiers.

No, it's not the real pack of Pall Malls that Kurt Vonnegut once smoked, but it gives Will an opportunity to reflect on this unhealthy aspect of the celebrated author's life. In Will's words: "Kurt Vonnegut smoked Pall Malls nearly his whole life... Vonnegut's 84-year lifespan would have given him time to smoke one million Pall Mall cigarettes. Do the math: 70 years of smoking, two packs a day, 50,000 packs, 20 cigarettes per pack. At five minutes per cigarette, smoking would have eaten up nine-and-a-half years, or 8.8 percent of Kurt Vonnegut's time on earth." By the way, Vonnegut threatened to sue Brown & Williamson because he didn't die from smoking despite the package warning.

It's also not the actual purple velour shirt worn by the flamboyant and convicted pimp, the late Jerry Hostetler, whose equally ostentatious house on East Kessler Blvd. was not a sight for sore eyes, but an eyesore for many years. And still is.

Then there was the so-called hanging farmer from Illinois who came to Indy to assist in the execution of George Barrett,

convicted of killing an FBI agent. The Illinois man was summoned because he, well let's say, knew the ropes.

Then there's the fascinating story of Elfrieda Mais, a racecar driver wannabee who often ran a few laps prior to regional races around the country to demonstrate her prowess. Maybe she was the country's first female racecar driver. She also walked on the wings of planes, possibly the air-apparent of future stunt women.

And then there's John Dillinger whose proficiency at baseball led to his learning how to rob a bank. Yes, it's quite a story.

The exhibit is only open till September 20th. Enter Museum of Fabulosity in your search engine for details.

Will Higgins is pleased with the success of his exhibit and is thinking of doing a future display of Indy 500 offbeat memorabilia. How will he pull that off? Where there's Will, there's a way.

Dick Wolfsie is a retired TV personality, author, speaker, teacher and all-around good guy. His award-winning column appears here weekly. If you'd like to learn more about joining Dick on an upcoming trip to Costa Rica, go to this paper's website and click on the Collette Travel ads.

LABUBU

Continued from Page 1

that were advertised as 100% authentic PopMart Labubus. Shipping said it would take 7-14 business days; it took well over a month. In this time, I was in constant communication with [name redacted] asking for the status of my shipment and asking if this was a scam - they said it was in transit and it was not a scam...items received are knockoff counterfeit Labubu dolls, made in very poor quality..."

- BBB has tips for spotting and avoiding counterfeit products when shopping online:
- Shop from reputable retailers. If you're shopping for toys, you want to ensure you're getting the right products. Counterfeit products can lead to health and safety risks. Shop for toys at reputable retailers that you know and are familiar with. Check with BBB.org to read customer reviews and check BBB ratings. BBB Accredited Businesses follow BBB's

Standards for Trust. You can find trusted online businesses by looking for the BBB Seal.

- Use caution when clicking on sponsored ads. You may come across an ad on social media promoting a sale on this season's hot toy. Or, when doing an online search, you may see that the top search result is promoting a big sale. Scammers are taking advantage of sponsored or promoted ad spots on search engines and social media to trick online shoppers. Before you purchase anything online, always check that you are on a real and secure website.
- Be wary of too-good-to-be-true deals. If the product you want is extremely discounted, think twice before purchasing. Highly discounted merchandise is a red flag for a fake website or counterfeit products.
- Read customer reviews. It's always

a good idea to read customer reviews before making a purchase. If the website doesn't show any, do an online search for reviews on other sites like BBB.org.

- Do your research. If you're on an unfamiliar website, before you click purchase, do your research on the website. Do an online search with the website name and "scam," or check to see if there are any reports on BBB Scam Tracker.
- Use secure and traceable payment methods. Credit cards typically offer additional protection if you are scammed. Be wary if the website you're on asks you to pay with a peer-to-peer payment app.

If you've experienced a scam when purchasing Labubu or another toy, you can report it to BBB Scam Tracker to warn others.

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Barry Odom Brings Reasons for Optimism to Purdue Football



Ken Thompson
Columnist

With a few exceptions, expectations have never been high for Purdue football in my lifetime.

Last season's 1-11 record dropped the program's winning percentage to .513. That's still better than Big Ten peers Indiana (.422), Northwestern (.447), Rutgers (.492) and Illinois (.505) but nothing to brag about.

Purdue's eight Big Ten championships match Northwestern for eighth place in league history. To put things in perspective, Woody Hayes of Ohio State and Bo Schembechler of Michigan won 13 league titles apiece.

Now add the perception - make that reality - that Purdue's administrations past and present have been thrifty with the dollar when it comes to investing in football and other athletic ventures. That's not a sustainable philosophy with today's billion-dollar TV contracts, revenue sharing and legal/illegal Name-Image-Likeness deals.

In today's greedy atmosphere, a few more national TV duds like Notre Dame (66-7 on CBS), Oregon (35-0, Fox), Ohio State (45-0, Fox), Penn State (49-10, CBS) and Indiana (66-0, Fox Sports 1) and the Big Ten's TV partners might suggest severing Purdue's membership.

That's why it was surprising to hear from new coach Barry Odom about financial and resource promises he received before agreeing to take the Purdue job.

"Ecstatic would be a descriptive word on how I felt about what (athletic director) Mike Bobinski talked to me about in the interview process," Odom said this past June. "It was very aggressive. Purdue is not going to take a backseat to anyone ... in the revenue share. The Big Ten is setting the standard in college football on what that looks like. We will be as

competitive as anyone.

"I know this. It's year 26 for me in coaching and I couldn't ask for a better leader in six months than what Mike Bobinski has done. We've locked arms every step of the way. What do we need to do to get Purdue football back? In those conversations he's made every single thing happen."

Purdue has agreed to distribute the maximum allowed revenue sharing cost of \$20.5 million in the 2025-26 school year. While no specific percentages are being revealed by Bobinski, it figures that football will probably receive 70 to 75 percent of those funds. Men's basketball, it is assumed, will get the lion's share of what's left over.

The second most difficult task facing Odom, after restocking a roster that lost 21 of 22 starters to either the transfer portal or exhausted eligibility, is convincing a fan base that often expects the worst-case scenarios to come true.

"There's hope, vision and belief," Odom said. "It's part of my job to inspire those around me to want to believe in positivity. Let's believe in we're going to make it happen, not allow it to happen. When you get in crunch time, it's the positive thinking of 'we're going to win this game,' not 'woe is me. Here we go again.' I choose to look at opportunities and solutions rather than problems and issues. When you prepare the right way, things seem to fall your way when it comes down to the 50-50 ball or the last-second field goal. That you put your kids in position to be successful."

At the first team meeting after taking the job, Odom was faced with the reality that most of the 2024 roster was out the door.

"There weren't many guys in the room," Odom recalled.

One who hadn't left yet was quarterback Ryan Browne, who provided one of the few bright moments of 2024 with 297 yards passing and 118 yards rushing in the 50-49 overtime loss at

Illinois.

"He was already really out the door but at least I gave him something to think about, about program direction, structure, coaching staff even though we didn't have a coordinator or quarterbacks coach hired at that time," Odom said. "I talked about philosophy. I could tell he was torn a little bit. I wished him the best. I told him I didn't want to lose him. If things don't work out or if you have a change of mind/heart at your new place we'll be here. I tried to do that with all the guys I had a chance to talk with, who were already out the door when I got here."

Browne committed to North Carolina on Dec. 19, 2024. After four months under new coach Bill Belichick, Browne had second thoughts and returned to West Lafayette. Either Browne or Arkansas transfer Malachi Singleton is likely to start opening day against Ball State.

"He had some clarity now as to who our coordinator was, our position coach was," Odom said. "I think the conversations he had with people still on the roster played in our favor. I had seen enough tape on Ryan from last year. I really liked his genuine makeup from the one conversation I had with him before he left. So we started recruiting him actively at that point."

"Ryan to me showed competitive spirit in the opportunities he had last year. You look at arm release, ability to make most throws, athletic ability. It appeared to me on film he had some toughness. All of those things you look at how important they are, I think he's got a big upside."

Browne probably also was sold on Odom's philosophy of loading up on the offensive line, a disappointing facet of Purdue's starting lineup a year ago.

Offensive linemen Jalen St. John, Mason Vicari and Hank Purvis were among the players to transfer in from UNLV. Canadian behemoth (6-3, 305 pounds)



Photo Courtesy of Purdue Athletics

Barry Odom and Mike Bobinski.

start is former Carmel standout Ethan Trent, who was awarded a scholarship during the spring by Odom.

"I'm always going to oversign, if they're good enough, offensive and defensive linemen," Odom said. "If you can't run the ball and you can't protect the quarterback, you have no chance to have any success. Defensively, if you can't stop the run you're not going to be a good defense."

"In my opinion, you better find five guys you feel like are your starters. You better find No. 6, 7 and 8 that are going to play meaningful snaps. And if you don't have three centers that you can win with, it's going to be really hard. If you don't have a really good center that can start the play off, then a lot of plays can get wrecked. I was willing to do what we had to do from a roster space standpoint to try to get those spots right."

Before Odom was greeted by mostly empty seats at the first team meeting, he knew a similar strategy to his rebuild at UNLV was going to be necessary.

"I knew that it would be

ing staff did a nice job of identifying players they thought could come here and help us win, that fit what we were looking for.

"I think it's so important that we signed a lot of high school guys in this year's class. Next year's high school class is going to be a lot bigger than this year's high school class. I believe in the foundational approach. You'd like to get to the point where (the transfer) number is not nearly as high. But then also if you recruit a bunch of guys through the portal that you've got for eight months, then you are going to replace them with somebody."

"Then how do you build a team together? How do you take those 24 post-spring signees and blend them with the new guys plus the high school guys plus the returners? There's no book on that."

A stark example of a position upheaval from 2024 to 2025 is the Purdue secondary. Veteran college football writer Tom Dienhart of GoldandBlack.com observed recently that the unit has four fifth-year seniors and four sixth-year players.

handful of holdovers from the Ryan Walters regime. Almost certain is that Odom's core philosophies will produce a better effort on the field.

"The core beliefs in our team, bottom line: Knowing your assignments, playing with energy and enthusiasm, playing tough and physical, and being a six-second competitor," Odom said. "If you do those four things, you're setting yourself up for success. A guy who won't play hard won't be on the field. That's a non-negotiable for me. We're not going to have guys who won't give tremendous effort. Let's put on tape we're the hardest playing team in college football. When you do that, it erases a lot of deficiencies."

"Do we have a long way to go in that department? Absolutely. Will we get there? You're dadgum right we will."

Kenny Thompson is the former sports editor for the Lafayette Journal & Courier and an award-winning journalist. He has covered Purdue athletics for many years.



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