



Suspect sought in Beverly rental scam

By Cate Lecuyer

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BEVERLY — Looking for an apartment earlier this month, Endicott College graduate Alex Kane turned to Craigslist and found what looked like the perfect home on the second floor of 40 Bartlett St.

She met Robert Booth, who claimed to be the owner and showed her around, she said.

"I trusted him," she said. "He was fun, in his 30s, and had bought the four-family home with his sister and started S&R Trust."

She loved it and met up again with Booth at Atomic Café, this time to sign the lease and hand over the first and last month's rent — just short of \$2,000, Kane said. She planned to move in Sept. 1 with her dog, Rex.

Kane arranged to show the apartment to her mother, who would be visiting from Connecticut on July 17.

"He said he would be more than happy to show it," she said.

But when they called on the 17th, Booth's phone was not in service. Kane dialed the number he gave her for his sister, but it turned out to be a completely different person. Then she started searching online for S&R Trust and realized it didn't exist. Finally, she and her mom went to the apartment and knocked on the door. There was no answer.

"The tenants below came out and asked us who we were looking for," Kane said. "I said 'Robert Booth,' and she turned to her husband and said 'Oh, my God, Mike, it's another one,' and she turned back to me and said, 'I'm so sorry.'"

Kane soon learned Booth is wanted by the Beverly police for pulling the same scam with at least three other people.

Beverly police spokesman John McCarthy said victims filed police reports on July 18, 14, 10 and 1.

Booth has been charged with larceny by false pretenses, and there are four warrants out for his arrest.

"It's an issue of finding him," McCarthy said. His last known address is 40 Bartlett St.

Norman Richards, who owns the building with his family, said Booth, 31, lived there for about eight months, but had been asked to leave by the end of June for not paying his rent. The apartment was listed by Ralph Leonard Associates.

"He did leave," Ralph Leonard said. "With other people's money. By the time we knew what was going on, he

was gone."

Richards, who lives on the first floor, said he noticed people coming and going, and Booth told him he was selling his furniture.

"I didn't think he was trying to show the apartment," he said. Then, he got a surprise.

"On July 1, two guys pulled up with a pickup truck full of furniture," he said. "They had a key and everything."

He said he feels bad for the people who were taken.

"I don't want to see these people get ripped off," he said. "I hope they find him."

Leonard said he was surprised nobody noticed his company's "For Rent" sign and brochures — which kept disappearing — on the front lawn. But when prospective tenants asked about it, Booth told them there was a problem with people on the first floor, and he had hired a company to deal with renting out the downstairs, Leonard said.

"He was very convincing," Leonard said. "It takes a huge amount of nerve to do that."

Leonard said the apartment was listed for \$825, not including utilities. Kane signed Booth's lease for \$950 a month, including heat, electricity, Internet and cable.

"It was a deal," she said.

And too good to be true.

Yet, apartment scams like this one are relatively unheard of in Beverly. Leonard said he's been in the business for 50 years, and this is the first time he's run across something like this.

"Really people should check and not just assume someone is the owner," he said.

McCarthy had the same advice and said renters should verify information with the Police Department before signing a lease and putting down a payment.

However, the scam also came as a surprise to police.

"From our standpoint, this is something unique and new that we've never seen before," McCarthy said. "The guy is smooth. People are desperate now, and think of how creative that was."

The best chance the victims have of getting any money back is if Booth is arrested.

"He'll get caught eventually, and he'll go to court," McCarthy said. "I don't know why he did it, but eventually we will find out."

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Photos



Alex Kane, with her dog, Rex, in front of the Beverly apartment she thought she had rented. Kane is one of at least four people who fell victim to a Craigslist apartment scam. Staff Photo