



**Police Foundation: Be Leery of Charity Telemarketers  
by Thomas F. Murphy**

Let me begin this month's article with a simple reminder: **"The Palm Beach Gardens Police Foundation never uses telephone solicitations at any time."**

You'll find this statement on the Foundations website, on most of its mailings, and its regular email newsletters. It's been a premise of the organization since its inception in 2007.

When the federal government allowed Americans to finally enjoy dinner in peace without being hassled by unwanted phone calls from telemarketers and passed the "do-not-call legislation", they exempted politicians as well as non-profit organizations. Since most telemarketing firms therefore lost their for-profit accounts they turned to non-profit organizations for new business.

Here in Florida some of the most common telemarketing calls we receive are for the firefighters, the sheriff, the police, the highway patrol, the state troopers, the paramedics, the hurricane relief fund, the fund to send care packages to our troops, and on and on.

The callers typically go into a long diatribe about how money is so sorely needed to provide services at the current levels, or pull the emotional strings of how, say, our troops go without so much to protect our freedom and we really should give them a little help.

Unfortunately an extremely small fraction of the monies these companies raise actually goes to the cause they claim to be fundraising for. The calls typically come from for-profit professional telemarketers, often out of state, that keep a sizeable portion of your donation for themselves and really care very little about the cause they are promoting. These companies will also get to you by saying it is "easier and safer" to take care of your donation by giving them your credit card.

There are a number of things we should be doing when we receive these telemarketing calls:

- Find out if the person with whom you are speaking is a volunteer or employee of the charity they claim to represent – or if they actually work for a telemarketing company.
- Ask the person on the other end of the line to tell you how much of your donation will actually end up with the charity. By law, they must tell you. These telemarketers negotiate their fees ahead of time and know exactly how much of every dollar raised goes to the charity and how much stays with the telemarketing company ... and they typically keep 80%-90% of each dollar raised!
- Ask the person calling to send you a copy of the charity's annual report or a brochure describing its mission and accomplishments. Effective and efficient charities are proud of their accomplishments and are able to provide written materials describing their mission, program accomplishments, and financial information.
- Ask them such things as, "do you have a website," or "do you have another phone number I can call to verify the legitimacy of your organization?"
- If you determine that the telemarketer is calling you on behalf of a charity that you truly wish to support, contact the charity itself and find out how to donate to it directly. That way you avoid having any part of your donation taken by a for-profit telemarketing company.
- Never give out credit card, bank account, or other personal information over the phone to telemarketers.
- Beware of "sound alike" organizations that have names similar to responsible, reputable charities. Don't be swayed merely by a benevolent-sounding name.
- Remember that you have the right to end the phone call whenever you wish. You should never feel coerced into either giving or continuing the conversation.
- Although you are still eligible to receive calls soliciting contributions after you've registered your phone number with the National Do Not Call Registry, you do have some recourse. If you receive a call from a third-party telemarketer on behalf of a charity (rather than the charity itself), then you can ask that firm to stop calling. If the telemarketing firm calls again soliciting for the same charity, then that firm should be reported and could face a fine.

The bottom line is, be very leery of telemarketers looking to raise funds for a “local” charity. Support only those organizations that you know are fiscally responsible and financially healthy... and support them directly, not through marketing companies or telemarketers.

The Palm Beach Gardens Police Foundation is the **ONLY** organization authorized to raise funds on behalf of the Palm Beach Gardens Police Department. The Foundation does not solicit funds by phone or use telemarketers of any type. No one is salaried or compensated in any way. The Foundation serves as a vehicle for your tax-exempt gifts which provide resources directly to the Palm Beach Gardens Police Department. You can learn more about the Foundation by visiting their website at [www.pbgpf.org](http://www.pbgpf.org) or by calling (561) 799-4440

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