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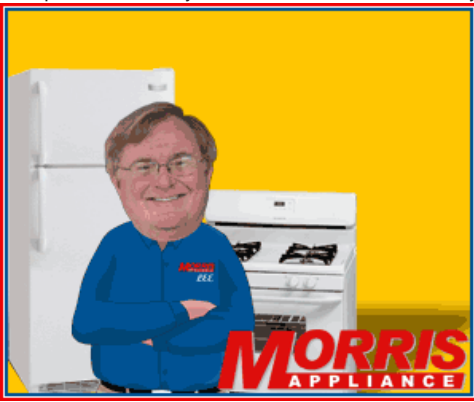
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 Wednesday, May. 19, 2010

Card breach a hassle for customers

By LINDA S. MORRIS - lmorris@macon.com

The security breach announced last week that compromised credit and debit cards used at a Warner Robins restaurant was bothersome for customers, but it didn't invade their financial identities.

So far, the investigation into a breach of cards used at the Mellow Mushroom occurred in the process between the restaurant and the card processor, and no one's personal identity has been stolen, said attorney Kelly Burke, who is representing the restaurant.



"To our knowledge, nobody here has had dates of birth, Social Security number and all that kind of thing stolen," Burke said. "The only thing that could have been stolen from the data we had is name, credit card number and expiration date, which means (the thieves) are going to make cards."

"Once that card gets identified and cancelled and reissued, that doesn't affect your credit. Nobody's credit is going to get ruined out of this breach."

The problem was in the process system and that's either in the computer system leading up to the processor or the processor itself, Burke said.

"The computing system is hooked up to the Internet, so it could be anywhere along that process," he said.

The restaurant immediately changed its card processor, and credit or debit card issuers blocked the cards and reissued new cards, he said. Robins Federal Credit Union blocked about 2,000 credit and debit cards last week.

Tabitha Pugh, public information officer for the Warner Robins Police Department, said Monday its involvement has been limited. It has received three reports of fraud.

"Most of it has been turned over to the Secret Service," Pugh said. "They are still trying to get everything collected, and I don't think they have determined the scope of it."

While customers weren't affected financially, the Mellow Mushroom has been, Burke said.

"It's going to cost gobs of money, and it's cut into their business," he said. "It will have an impact on employees and management for some time as a result of this breach."

The breach was not caused by a server inside the restaurant or someone going into the computer system and retrieving data, Burke said.

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"Unfortunately, it was linked to the Mellow Mushroom but we do not believe it was anything internal on our part," he said.

"This is not classic identity fraud," Burke said. Hackers "apparently made credit cards and they literally sell them on the street." The card buyer takes a chance the card is still good and uses it until it's declined.

"We are working with the Secret Service and forensic audit team to figure out what happened," Burke said. "These breaches happen unfortunately every day all across the country and it's something the industry has got to figure out how to address."

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