

## RENT

Continued from Page 1

the costs as an expense of doing business.

"What did they do before credit checks?" Dwyer asked. "It's capital greed is what it is."

### Rental rebuttal

While Dwyer calls it greed,

University-area rental companies claim the fee just covers their costs.

Several managers said the amount of the application charge is close to the amount they pay to run the check. And in addition to the expense of running a credit check, these companies also pay for the labor needed to verify references. Nevertheless, when reporters

contacted five agencies with dozens of rentals in the University, most were reluctant to offer specific information about the costs — or profits — associated with application fees.

And while a few agency managers disclosed some information, several others would not discuss the amount of applications they regularly process, the total amount of money they take in from them, or the expenses of screening applicants, saying the information was private or not available.

What rental agencies do admit is that the primary cost of screening applicants is obtaining reports of the applicants' credit history. Most companies subscribe to a credit service that investigates a person's background, giving them such information as whether a person has a record of unpaid debts, previous evictions or any criminal convictions.

Jennings and Co. and Bennett Management, both with rentals near the University, use the services of Portland-based Equifax or Credit Northwest, a division of Equifax.

Glenda Swift, Credit Northwest's sales account executive, said the costs of her company's services vary according to the property company's "volume of usage" — with high-usage companies paying less than infrequent users.

However, Swift did say that businesses join the system by paying a one-time installation fee of \$85 to \$175, and then pay for each report requested which can cost between \$1.50 and \$20.

### Making a profit

Jami Counard, Bennett Management's general manager, estimated it costs the company \$40 a month to rent a computer terminal to access information from Credit Northwest, and that the average price they pay to get a report on one person is about \$4 or \$5.

Sharon Sykes, administrative assistant for Bennett Management, estimated that the company processes about 50 applications a month at \$20 each. Gross income from that number of application fees would amount to \$1,000 a month — a figure well above the average costs of running that many credit checks.

Counard admitted Bennett Management doesn't always spend all of the money it collects from the fee to run a credit check, saying that the agency does make a profit from the application fees.

"We're a business. We're in business to make money," she said, but added that they don't make "gobs of it."

While Bennett Management does make "a small amount of profit," Counard said she believes application fees are in everybody's best interest, protecting both the landlord and the tenant from problems that could arise if a tenant moved into a place but could not pay the rent.

Jennings and Co. also charges \$20 for each person living in a unit unless the applicants are family members. Jennings and Co. owner, Kent Jennings, estimated that in August, one of its busiest months, the company processed about 600 applications — bringing in at least \$12,000 in application fees.

Blanton said \$12,000 sounds like a lot of money, but that the company makes about six calls

## OSPIRG hotline gives rental laws, information

By Carrie Dennett  
Emerald Reporter

Among the population of renters and property management companies exists some confusion about the rights and obligations of each.

To ease the confusion, the University chapter of OSPIRG began a consumer hotline several years ago to provide information on landlord/tenant laws and other consumer issues.

"For the past three or four years it has been a regularly established phone resource for information about consumer issues," said hotline co-director Andy Brainard. Before then, the service operated on an on-and-off basis.

Although the hotline deals with questions about many consumer issues, he said 90 percent of the calls concern landlord/tenant laws, with 80 percent of those from students wanting to know what their rights are.

The most common questions from renters involve habitability issues such as adequate heat, water and suitable upkeep of the units. The second most commonly asked questions involve security deposits.

Brainard said the hotline also hears questions about everything from illegal pets to evictions. Evictions questions are very difficult, because they are very complex and differ radically.

The hotline receives a fair amount of calls from landlords and managers, he said, usually with questions about their responsibilities and the responsibilities of their tenants.

"We'd like to see more landlords call and get involved. It's an education thing," he said, adding that landlords do not want to break the law, but that many of them are simply unaware of applicable laws.

The hotline is staffed by

six to eight volunteers, who attend a class that gives an overview of landlord/tenant law. Brainard said it is impossible to teach the volunteers everything about the numerous laws, so they are given an overview and instructed how to locate applicable laws in the resource manuals.

For years the OSPIRG hotline was the only service of its kind, but now questions on consumer issues can also be answered by the Department of Justice in Salem.

However, Brainard said there are drawbacks to the Salem service. Part of the advantage OSPIRG has is convenience. Calling Salem is long distance, and the office is open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. only.

OSPIRG, on the other hand, requires only a local call, and is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Students can also drop by the office in EMU Suite 1, or leave a message and have their call returned.

Another plus is that OSPIRG will give the title and the ordinance number of the statute that applies to the caller's question, while the Department of Justice will only give the title.

Brainard said there is one limitation to what the hotline volunteers will tell a caller.

"We don't give advice on what to do," he said. "(But) we will tell them what the next step is."

"We don't want to put ourselves in the position of someone coming back and saying we gave them bad advice," he said.

Brainard said students need to make better use of the information that is out there in order to protect themselves.

The hotline number is 346-HELP. OSPIRG also publishes a renter's handbook, which costs \$3 for students, \$4 for non-students.

for each applicant, of which 65 percent are long distance.

"And we're not too far away from that (\$12,000) number if you add in the Equifax charge," he said.

### Ban opposed

Overall, Blanton said those who work in the rental business believe applications are a fair and necessary part of the rental process.

"I believe it's a very fair practice," said Pat Oran, manager of the Broadway Apartments, which has many student tenants. Unlike other rental companies, Oran has renters send their \$25 application fee directly to the credit check service, eliminating suspicion that Oran makes money from them.

Oran said she doesn't understand why other companies don't do the same thing she does.

However, Blanton and Counard said they have heard few complaints about the way they or others do business.

"I've heard of (application fees) as high as \$50, and I don't think people complain about

it," Counard said.

Blanton echoed Counard's sentiments, saying that resistance to the fees has been "minimal at best." Besides, he added, if renters find a company's fees too high, they don't have to rent with them.

But Andy Brainard, co-director of an Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group's consumer hotline, which answers questions about landlord-tenant relations, said during the last six months the hotline has received three or four times as many inquiries as usual about the legality of application fees.

Brainard encourages students to call Consumer Credit Reporting if they are rejected for an apartment based on their credit or if they are curious about who has inquired about their credit. This is also a way to verify that one's application fee money is being spent for its intended purpose, he said.

For a fee, Consumer Credit Reporting gives people information on who has requested credit information about them and what results a credit service gave to those requesting it.

Monday, February 18, 1991

## SPRINGFIELD SMOKE SHOP

TOBACCO • PIPES • LIGHTERS • INCENSE  
KNIVES • GIFTS • CANDY

1124 Main St., Springfield, OR 97477  
Mon-Sat 10-8 Sun 12-6

503-747-8529  
800-782-9495



"27 years of  
Quality Service"

## GERMAN AUTO SERVICE, INC.

Mercedes • BMW • Volkswagon  
Audi • Datsun • Toyota

10% discount to U of O students on all repairs.

Offer good through 2/28/91

342-2912

2025 Franklin Blvd.  
Eugene, Oregon 97403

## TAX WORKSHOP

FOR

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND FACULTY

Preparation of tax returns for U.S. Income  
Taxes—1040 NR

Thursday, February 21, 1991

3:00-5:00 p.m. EMU Gumwood Room

Resource People: Susan Gary, Tax Attorney

Ennis Wuite, Certified Public Accountant

1040 NR forms and instruction books will be provided.

Participants should bring with them their W-2 forms, December 31 paycheck stubs, receipts and other documents needed to help them complete their federal tax forms.

Sponsored by the Office of International Services, Graduate School and GTF Federation  
For more information call 346-3206

## WALT DISNEY WORLD COLLEGE PROGRAM

Walt Disney World Co. representatives will present an information session on the Walt Disney World College Program on Thursday, February 21, 1991, at 6:00 pm at the Union. Attendance at this presentation is required to interview for the SUMMER '91 COLLEGE PROGRAM. Interviews are scheduled for Friday, February 22, 1991 at Career Planning and Placement. The following majors are encouraged to attend: Recreation, Business, Communication and Theatre/Drama.

Contact: Student  
Employment

Phone: 346-3214



Walt Disney World Co.

© The Walt Disney Company

An Equal Opportunity Employer