

Court grants adoptees right to track down parents

■ The U.S. Supreme Court rejects a request by six mothers to delay the law

By Brad Cain
The Associated Press

SALEM — Perhaps Geena's Stonum's birth parents aren't even alive. Or maybe they'd rather that she stay away from them. But as of Wednesday, state law is no longer keeping this adoptee — and thousands more — from finding out their true parents' identities.

"I have a wonderful family, but there's still that piece that's missing," said the 41-year-old Stonum, a mother of two. "When you see people who maybe look like you, you wonder if they're maybe related to you."

On Tuesday, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor rejected an emergency request to delay Oregon's 1998 adoption records law from going into effect.

That ended two years of court battles begun by a group of birth mothers who argued the new law violates the privacy of people like

themselves who gave up their children for adoption and started new lives.

The Oregon Health Division on Wednesday will begin processing applications of more than 2,200 adoptees who already have paid \$15 to get their original birth certificates. Most are eager to know their parents' identities, and many want to know more about their medical histories. It could take up to six weeks to finish mailing certificates to adoptees, the agency said.

While adoptees eagerly anticipated the chance to learn about their past, Frank Hunsaker, attorney for a group of six anonymous birth mothers who had fought the law in court, was bitter about the removal of the last legal roadblock.

"My clients are extremely disappointed and scared and even angry that their rights have been ignored by Oregon's voters and Oregon's courts," Hunsaker said.

He said the adoption law, which gives adult adoptees access to their original birth certificates, violates an implied contract the

women thought they had that their identities would be protected and that they would never be contacted by the children they relinquished.

There are some birth mothers "who haven't even told spouses or

mother.

Teller said times have changed — being a single parent is no longer a stigma — and that should be reflected in the state's adoption regulations.

"It (the law) affirms for us that what happened back then shouldn't have been so shameful and secret," Teller said. "For years I did live in shame, but it's a whole different world now."

The law first was approved by Oregon voters in November 1998 after a campaign in which adoptees said that finding their birth parents could help detect potential health problems and, more importantly, give them a sense of identity.

Last week, a state appellate court refused to extend an earlier stay blocking the law from taking effect, leaving the U.S. Supreme Court as the only option for opponents.

O'Connor, who fields emergency matters from Oregon for the nation's highest court, rejected the six anonymous birth mothers' request to stay the law. Her action

meant it would go into effect at 5:01 p.m. Tuesday, the deadline set earlier by the state Supreme Court.

In 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review a similar open adoption records law from Tennessee.

Tennessee and just three other states — Alaska, Delaware and Kansas — allow adult adoptees access to original birth certificates, which often have birth parents' names. An adoption records bill in Alabama is awaiting the governor's signature.

A spokesman for the Nation Council for Adoption, a Washington-based group that opposes opening adoption records, predicted that the number of Oregon adoptions would decline because birth mothers no longer have guarantees of confidentiality.

"I think a majority of the women will reluctantly decide to keep the baby, to try to make it as a single parent, and the others will terminate the pregnancy," Bill Pierce said.

Vacancies

continued from page 1

in Eugene, the market is much tighter in terms of vacancies.

Arlene Graham, a property manager with Portland Rental Service, said that out of more than 200 properties that she manages, there is only one current vacancy.

"While properties around the campuses here have higher vacancies than those in other parts of Portland, we have a lot of students who live in outlying parts of

the city and commute to the universities," she said.

Graham also said that her company deals with a large number of people wanting to share housing, much like the market in Eugene.

"The quality of housing has definitely climbed here," she said.

Jerry Duerksen, a broker with Duerksen and Associates, a property management company in Corvallis, said that vacancy rates there are often around 2 to 3 percent during the year. In the summer, that rate only increases to 5

or 6 percent.

"We are expecting a record enrollment at [Oregon State University] this year, and the existing units are already filled up," Duerksen said.

He said that several upscale units were built in the mid-1990s, and even those are filled to capacity.

"Things are definitely tighter now than they have been in the past," he said.

However, rents in both Portland and Corvallis are comparable to those in Eugene. Graham

said that while downtown rents are rather high, those in southern Portland are "more than reasonable."

According to Duerksen, rents in Corvallis range from \$225 for a quad apartment to \$1000-plus for a four-bedroom house.

Many property management companies will offer discounts on summer rents if students are planning to live in Eugene in order to finish a lease or attend summer school.

Kent Jennings, owner of Jennings Property Management Co.,

said that his company offers 30 to 50 percent off on summer rents, and some properties in Eugene have up to 20 percent vacancy rates during the summer months.

He attributed the renter-friendly market to the several new upscale units that have been built in the last few years.

"All of the new product being built everywhere, along with the new affluence among students, will make prices more stable," he said. "There will be a lot more deals and a better selection out there."

The School of Journalism and Communication's Award-Winning Student Magazine



Treetop Refuge For Howler Monkeys

A Belizean sanctuary redefines conservation

Burning Questions

A chemical weapon's incineration complex nears completion in rural Oregon

Coyote Eradication In The West

A federal program aims to protect livestock

Twenty Years After The Eruption

Life comes back to Mount St. Helens

Available at the UO Bookstore or in the EMU

FLUX
Get your copy today!