

IRS deadline looms over unprepared tax filers

Taxes or filing extensions must be postmarked today

By Sheldon Traver
Freelance Reporter

In the 18th century, Benjamin Franklin uttered these now-famous words: "Nothing is certain in life except death and taxes."

Tax day has arrived, and with it comes stress, angst and anxiety for many students and faculty members. For those receiving refunds, today is nothing to worry about; however, many citizens are opening their wallets and writing checks payable to Uncle Sam before midnight.

According to the Internal Revenue Service's official Web site, <http://www.irs.gov>, one in five Americans waits until the last week to file their taxes, and most of these people will owe taxes to the government. An estimated 8.2 million citizens are expected to file an extension on their taxes.

But the IRS has this warning: "This is an extension to file a return, not an extension to pay your taxes." Filers must still pay what they estimate their taxes to be. The IRS has even made it easier to pay by accepting credit cards.

"Usually I'm filing in the last week,"

Eugenean Fred Schaad said. "I'm a person who just doesn't think of it... I don't have a calendar in my brain."

Rose Woods, a Eugene baker, waited in line at an AARP tax help site to get help on her taxes. She said procrastination is her biggest foe when it comes to preparing taxes.

"I just figure I'll have plenty of time, then it's like 'Oh no,'" Woods said about her experiences during the past few years.

Many other people also stood in line at the downtown Atrium Building during their lunch breaks or after work, waiting for free tax help from the AARP.

"We usually file 5,500 federal returns in Eugene and Springfield every year," said Gwen Williams, the district tax coordinator for the AARP. Volunteers help people who may be chronic procrastinators or who are simply unable to get their taxes done elsewhere. They also try to maximize every filer's return.

"We try to let them know what to keep," Williams said. "Keep track of all donations, including Girl Scout cookies, because 50 percent of the cost is considered a charitable donation."

Most students said they already filed their taxes.

"I did it early to avoid the hassle and to have less of a chance for errors," undeclared sophomore Chloe Stallworth said. She added that her parents assist her with tax preparation.

Students and community members found free help with their taxes this year when accounting students from the Lundquist School of Business volunteered to prepare taxes.

"About 175 students and Eugene residents came to our Saturday sessions," senior accounting major Jeremy Allen said about this year's workshops, run by the Beta Alpha Psi honors fraternity.

Lois Douglass, an office specialist in the Office of Student Financial Aid, said it is just a myth that students receive more financial aid if they file their taxes early.

"We will not penalize you for filing your taxes late," Douglass said. "We simply encourage people to turn in the FAFSA prior to March 1 to get priority status, even if you are just estimating your taxes when completing the form."

April 15 is not all work for those who wait until the last minute to file their taxes, however.

"I get together with some other friends and wait until 11:45 p.m. to

drive to the post office for the postmark," Portlander Quinn Richmond said. "We have a barbecue and just make a party out of it."

Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland is home to the "Dancing General" every April 15. The General, who protests military spending, will dance and shout "Yeah" and "Yahoo" whenever someone drops their taxes off in the mailbox at the square.

The U.S. Post Office is also preparing for the last-minute flood of filers.

"We will have people collecting mail from cars until midnight," said Aric Skjelstad, assistant plant manager at the Springfield U.S. Post Office on Gateway Street.

The Springfield Police Department will assist the post office by directing traffic and providing signs to help last-minute filers get through the lines, which begin early in the evening.

"Starting at about 6 p.m. it stays steady until midnight," Skjelstad said.

The post office in downtown Eugene will also be open until 7 p.m. to take returns.

"I'm proud to be paying taxes in the United States," said Arthur Godfrey, a 1950s comedian, said. "The only thing is — I could be just as proud for half the money."

Sheldon Traver is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

BUSH

continued from page 1

University College Republicans member Anthony Warren said he expects Bush to gain popularity in Oregon because of his Healthy Forest Initiatives, which Warren said are environmentally friendly.

"I think that Bush has a good chance of winning Oregon," he said, adding that he does not put much faith in polls and that it is far too early to determine Oregon's favorite.

The survey also found that 1 percent of Oregonians supported independent candidate Ralph Nader and 6 percent were undecided. Bloom compared the recent survey to a March 4 poll conducted by The Oregonian, which had Kerry leading Bush 45 percent to 40 percent.

The survey shows Kerry leading in the Portland area, 53 percent to 40 percent, with Bush leading throughout the rest of Oregon, 51 percent to 39 percent.

Kerry also leads among independents and political moderates, while Bush leads Republicans and conservatives. Bush also leads with voters between 18 and 44, while Kerry leads with voters over 45. College-educated voters also prefer Kerry, according to

the survey.

The survey points out that a number of national polls show Kerry leading Bush, but that Bush leads in "battleground" states such as Oregon. Bloom noted that Kerry is not well known throughout Oregon, which allows Bush to more easily affect perceptions of the Democratic candidate. He said Bush's negative ad campaigns portraying Kerry as favoring tax increases are causing Kerry's ratings to drop.

"Those Bush ads seem to be tailor-made for Oregon's increasingly anti-tax environment," he said in the survey.

University College Democrats co-Chairman Kevin Curtin agreed that the state is a "battleground" for the two parties, although he sees Kerry pulling ahead considering Gore did so in the last election.

"(Oregon's) going to be very important to the election," he said.

Bloom said it is important to note the survey's time frame and that it's too early in the game to truly predict the outcome of Oregon's majority vote.

"At this point it really could go either way," he said.

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