

BRIEFLY

Continued from Page 1B
of the scope of these scams. Since January, North America residents have reported more than 3,465 employment scams to BBB Scam Tracker with more than \$3 million reported lost — which is a jump compared to the estimated 1,751 employment scams with more than \$800,000 lost from January to October of last year.

Better Business Bureau wants job seekers to be aware of employment scams that often trick “new employees” into giving out their personal information or their hard-earned money. Scammers may take advantage of the

upcoming holidays to prey on job seekers with scam job postings, fake recruiter emails and work-at-home schemes.

To avoid employment scams, job hunters should look out for these red flags: positions that require little or no training; vague company descriptions (go to www.bbb.org/northwest-pacific to see if the employer has a good rating); no interview or application; job applications that require a fee; recruiters who don't disclose information.

If you've been a victim of an employment scam, help others avoid being scammed by filing a report at www.bbb.org/Scam-Tracker.

PRINT

Continued from Page 1B
for St. Anthony's Hospital in Pendleton. The company also received a second-place award for its production of the Chief Joseph Days Poster for the Chief Joseph Days event held annually in Joseph.

Jules Van Sant, PPI Executive Director said, “Esprit, and Skip and Shannon, have been a consistent award winner at the Annual PrintRocks event year after year. Their extreme attention to excellent in all they produce is as sterling as their reputation in the Northwest printing industry. They are very supportive of our educational Trust. Skip is a PPI Board member and was honored last

year for his devotion over many years to the printing industry.”

Shannon Novakovich added, “We are very honored to be recognized by our peers. Esprit's philosophy has always been to provide our clients with the highest value they can receive for the dollars they spend on printing.”

Pacific Printing Industries (PPI) is a Northwest Printing Trade organization affiliated with Printing Industries of America, the world's largest graphic arts trade association. PPI serves the states of Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Utah by providing members products and services to enhance their growth, efficiency and profitability.

SEARS

Continued from Page 1B
operations going through bankruptcy. It's negotiating an additional \$300 million loan from Lampert's ESL Hedge fund.

The filing listed between \$1 billion and \$10 billion in assets while liabilities range between \$10 billion to \$50 billion. It listed the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corp., the federal agency that insures pensions, as Sears' biggest unsecured creditor, but noted the amount it owed as “unknown,” according to court documents.

Sears joins a growing list of retailers that have filed for bankruptcy or liquidated in the last few years amid a fiercely competitive climate. Some, like Payless Shoe-Source, successfully emerged from reorganization in bankruptcy court. But plenty of others like, Toys R Us and Bon-Ton Stores Inc., haven't. Both retailers were forced to shutter their operations this year soon after Chapter 11 filings.

Given its sheer size, Sears' bankruptcy filing will have wide ripple effects on everything from already ailing mall landlords to its tens of thousands of workers. But unlike other retailers that have gone bankrupt, there are not a lot of spoils for rivals to pick up. The company, once a big seller of toys, now has a tiny 2 percent market share in that area, according to investment research firm Jefferies. And its market share in major appliances has shrunk to just under 10 percent from 41 percent in 2001, accord-

ing to Johnson of Customer Growth Partners.

Lampert has been loaning his own money for years and has put together deals to prop up the company, which in turn has benefited his own ESL hedge fund.

Last year, Sears sold its famous Craftsman brand to Stanley Black & Decker Inc., following earlier moves to spin off pieces of its Sears Hometown and Outlet division and Lands' End.

In recent weeks, Lampert has been pushing for a debt restructuring and offering to buy some of Sears' key assets, like Kenmore, through his hedge fund as a \$134 million debt repayment came due on Monday. Lampert personally owns 31 percent of the company's shares, while his hedge fund has an 18.5 percent stake, according to FactSet.

Sears' stock has fallen from about \$6 over the past year to below the minimum \$1 level Nasdaq stocks are required to trade in order to remain on the stock index. In April 2007, shares were trading at around \$141.

The company, which once had 350,000 workers, has shrunk to 68,000 workers as of Monday's court filing. It had fewer than 900 stores as of May.

In a March 2017 government filing, Sears said there was “substantial doubt” it would be able to keep its doors open — but insisted its turnaround efforts would mitigate that risk.

Lampert pledged to return Sears to greatness by leveraging its best-known brands and its vast holdings of land, and more recently planned

to entice customers with a loyalty program. But losses continued and the company struggled to get more people through the doors or to shop online.

Jennifer Roberts, 36, of Dayton, Ohio, was a long-time fan of Sears and has fond memories of shopping there as a child. But in recent years, she's been disappointed by the lack of customer service and outdated stores.

“My mom had always bought her appliances from Sears. That's where my dad got his tools,” she said. “But they don't care about their customers anymore.”

She said a refrigerator her mother bought at Sears broke after two years and still hasn't been fixed.

“If they don't value a customer, then they don't need my money,” Roberts said.

Sales at the company's established locations tumbled nearly 4 percent during its fiscal second quarter. Still, that was an improvement from the same period a year ago. Total revenue dropped 30 percent in the most recent quarter, hurt by continued store closings.

“The problem in Sears' case is that it is a poor retailer,” Saunders wrote in an analyst note last week. “Put bluntly, it has failed on every facet of retailing from assortment to service to merchandise to basic shop keeping standards. Under benign conditions, this would be problematic enough but in today's hyper-competitive retail environment it is a recipe for failure on a grand scale.”

For decades, Sears was king of the American

shopping landscape. Sears, Roebuck and Co.'s iconic catalog featured items from bicycles to sewing machines to houses, and could generate excitement throughout a household when it arrived. The company began opening retail locations in 1925 and expanded swiftly in suburban malls from the 1950s to 1970s. But the onset of discounters like Walmart created challenges for Sears that have only grown. Sears faced even more competition from online sellers and appliance retailers like Lowe's and Home Depot.

Store shelves have been left bare as many vendors have demanded more stringent payment terms, says Mark Cohen, a professor of retailing at Columbia University and a former Sears executive.

Sears said it intends to pay workers' wages and benefits without interruption. Sears plans to hold a meeting for its employees at its corporate headquarters and other corporate locations on Tuesday.

But Sears workers are nervous about what kind of severance they'll receive if their stores close.

John Germann, 46, works full-time and makes \$14 per hour as the lead worker unloading merchandise from trucks at the Chicago Ridge, Illinois, store, which has been drastically reducing its staff since he started nine years ago. Germann now has only 11 people on his team, compared with about 30 a few years ago.

“We're doing the job of two to three people. It's not safe,” he said. “We're lifting treadmills and refrigerators.”

DANCE

Continued from Page 1B
classes divided by age, 3 to 4-year-olds who are introduced to ballet steps and tumbling; 5 to 6-year-olds who learn basic steps to more fast-paced music; 7 to 9-year-olds who meet twice a week and prepare dances for recitals and competitions; and the 12 to 17-year-olds who dance to lyrical and contemporary music as well as jazz and hip hop.

Katelyn Crowson is an athletic dance student in the older age bracket dance class, and she has been dancing for the past 3 years. She has participated with her team in the Spot Light competition, which happens in Boise. In this competition, her dance team competes against 8 different studios.

Explaining why she likes to take lessons and compete, “I like the adrenaline I get when people are watching me, and I enjoy being athletic, and it also keeps me in shape,” Crowson said.

Melvin Spears of La Grande brings his granddaughter to dance lessons and watches her practice twice a week. “This is

healthy for the kids. It's good exercise and offers good comradery, and she likes it.”

Pam Rheinecker also brings her granddaughter, Juliette Elliott, to Miss Kate's classes twice a week. “This is her fifth year now and she's 9 years old. She has been in competition two years now and in April will be her third year.”

The 2019 Spotlight competitions will be held the end of April 2019 at the Nampa Civic Center in Idaho, and hundreds of dancers will convene there to represent their studio. In past years, Altitudes Dance Academy students have placed very well in those competitions, and they are looking forward to the new year's event.

Rheinecker said it's remarkable to watch Juliette and other young girls transform over the years into accomplished dancers with confidence, especially at show time.

As they learn, “the big girls help the little girls,” she said. “It's a wonderful way that Miss Kate has worked with all of them.”

In the middle of all this activity is Huelter, who started her formal education

in dance in Portland at age three and continued in La Grande with dance instructors Becky Thompson and Swannee Herrmann, and through her middle and high school years with Patricia Sandlin.

“I always knew I wanted to continue with my dance education,” Huelter said, “but I didn't know if I wanted to dance or teach dancing or what I wanted to use it for, but I do remember that I was shy and not into sports, and that dancing was the only activity where I was very self-motivated.”

Consequently, during her freshman year at Boise State University, she studied dance at Dance Dimensions with instructor Julie

Stevens, who was the head coach of the university dance team.

After her freshman year at BSU, Huelter transferred to Eastern Oregon University and continued her dance education there. After graduating, she coached dancing for two years at EOU, and during that time, she started Altitudes Dance Academy.

To her delight, Huelter has seen enrollment grow steadily, starting with 25 students in 2013, 35 students in 2014-15, 50 students in 2016, 60 students in 2017 and 70 students this year. The children love her patient and creative teaching style, and they love what they see in the wall mirror,

children turning into artistic athletes.

To learn more about Altitudes Dance Academy or

to enroll in October, visit the studio's Facebook page or www.altitudesdanceacademy.com or call 541-786-8972.

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