

Check state for a check, says DSL

Need extra holiday cash? The state of Oregon may have money in your name.

The Division of State Lands (DSL) and Oregon Dept. of Revenue (ODR) are working together to try to locate the owners of more than 1,900 uncashed refund checks issued between July 1998 and June 1999.

The checks total nearly \$600,000. "Some of the checks are for large amounts - up to \$25,000 for businesses and up to \$9,000 for individuals," said Cheryl Gladden, claims coordinator in DSL's Trust Property Section.

"We're guessing that some of the checks were lost in the mail or misplaced by the businesses or individuals," Gladden said.

When the postal service returns undeliverable refund checks, ODR attempts to contact the taxpayers. If these efforts are not successful, the check information is listed on ODR Web site. After two years, ODR transfers these checks to DSL.

DSL staff also make a "diligent effort" to locate the missing owners. If the state can't find the owner, unclaimed proceeds are held in the Common School Fund (CSF) for claim by the owner or heir forever. The CSF benefits Oregon's K-12 public schools. Investment earnings are distributed to counties for schools twice a year.

To find out if the state is holding unclaimed property in your name, click on "Check for Unclaimed Property" on DSL Web site: www.oregonstatelands.us. The list is updated regularly and contains more than 710,000 names with accounts valued at nearly \$128 million.

No web access? Send your name, current and former addresses and daytime phone number to: Trust Property Section, Division of State Lands, 775 Summer St. N.E., Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-1279. Staff will search the database for your name at no charge. Allow 60 days for a response.

You also may obtain access through the Dept. of Revenue Web site at www.dor.state.or.us. Click on "Unclaimed refunds."

Klamath First planning two new branches

Klamath First Bancorp, Inc. announced plans to add two additional branches in Western Oregon next year, completing its nine in-store branch agreement with Wal-Mart.

The Grants Pass branch is slated for a July 2003 opening.

"These new branches will help us continue to fill in spots along the I-5 corridor," stated Kermit Houser, president and chief executive officer. "Grants Pass is a vibrant community, posting population growth during the '90s," said Houser.

"This fulfills our current agreement with Wal-Mart. Now we will look to other branch expansion opportunities along the I-5 corridor as well as a continued focus on improving profitability in all of our branches," added Marshall Alexander, executive vice president.



AN ILLINOIS VALLEY SAFE HOUSE is well into planning and fund-raising stages. An orientation and training session for prospective advocates was held Saturday, Dec. 14 in the county building in Cave Junction. A series of training session will begin in January. For more information phone Leandra Brocker, I.V. Safe House Community Resource director at 592-4147.

Public pension gap means agencies face higher fees

State and local governments need to pay sharply higher charges next year to fund the state's battered public pension system -- the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) -- plan directors were told last week in Tigard.

Spokesmen for school district and local government associations said that the rate increases, averaging 37 percent, are sure to be challenged in court.

"It's not something we expect to be taking lying down," said Ken Stobek, executive director of the League of Oregon Cities.

The rate increases proposed by an actuary had been expected because of the need to shore up the \$32 billion pension fund, which has dropped by approximately \$9 billion since 2000 because of investment losses.

The PERS board last week learned details of how the increases would affect the more than 850 city, county and state government units covered by PERS. If the board adopts the increases next month, they would take effect on July 1.

Analysts say that the fund faces a long-term shortfall of more than \$15 billion. The latest rate increases are based on eliminating the shortfall during a 26-year period.

State government faces a

'Smokefree' plan working

Oregon's Smokefree Workplace Law (OSWL) appears to have strong support: 76 percent of Oregonians in a statewide poll said they support it, and the state has received only 128 actionable complaints of possible violations.

"Thanks to OSWL, most workers do not have to choose between their jobs and their health; everyone deserves clean air," said Ken McGee, of Oregon Dept. of Human Services (DHS).

The law went into effect Jan. 1, 2002. Passed by the Oregon Legislature in 2001, it extended protection from second-hand smoke to an additional 500,000 people statewide not already covered by local or voluntary policies banning smoking indoors.

OSWL requires almost all employers to ensure their workplaces are smoke-free and display "No Smoking" signs. Exceptions include bars and taverns, bingo parlors, tobacco stores, bowling alleys and hotel and motel rooms designated as smoking rooms.

Judging by official complaints to the state, compliance to the new law is high. According to McGee, the number of "actionable" complaints is low. Actionable complaints are those that require DHS official follow-up.

more than 70 percent increase in charges for PERS, which an analyst said could add \$50 million more than expected to PERS costs for the 2003-05 state budget. An actuary said that the state's PERS rate will increase more than the average because an updated review of turnover showed fewer workers are quitting, which raises the state's future pension obligations.

Governments pay a percentage of payroll to fund PERS. The proposed increases would raise the state's PERS rate, for example, from approximately 10 percent to 17.6 percent of payroll.

A number of school districts are expected to contest the increases, based on a ruling by a Marion County judge this fall, said Jim Green, a spokesman for Oregon School Boards Association.

Mark Johnson, of Milliman USA, an actuarial consulting firm, proposes that the payroll rate paid by school districts for PERS rise by approximately 40 percent.

(Editor's Note: The preceding is by The Associated Press).

Clubs & Organizations

Siskiyou Project

On Friday, Dec. 20, Siskiyou Project will offer two award-winning films by producer John De Graaf.

"Affluenza" will show at 7 p.m., followed by "Escape from Affluenza." The films, free to the public, will be shown at 8890 Takilma Road.

For more data phone Siskiyou Project at 592-4459.

Military Officers Association

The Southern Oregon Chapter of the Military Officers Association will meet on Friday, Dec. 20 at Rogue Valley Manor, Medford.

Social hour will begin at 11:30 and lunch at noon.

The program will be a social affair without a guest speaker. The Sweet Adelines may provide entertainment.

All men and women who are or have been commissioned or warrant officers of the seven U.S. uniformed services, including the reserves or guard can attend.

For reservations phone Fred Borgasser, 474-4447.

Roadside memorials OK'd by Curry County officials

By Curry Coastal Pilot

Families or friends of traffic accident victims in Curry County can sponsor a roadside memorial sign to mark where they lost loved ones and remind motorists to drive safely.

Curry County commissioners last week passed an order establishing a memorial sign policy inspired by the death of Steve Morris, 16, of Brookings, who died of injuries in a motor vehicle accident on June 30 on South Bank Chetco River Road.

The sponsor of the sign does not have to be a family member of the victim, but must have permission from an appropriate member of the victim's family.

The black-on-white signs

will cost \$50 each, and will measure 3 feet by 1 foot. If more than one sign is requested, a larger sign would be constructed.

The memorial signs can be placed only along rural county roads.

The signs will read, "In Memory Of" and be followed by the names of a victim or victims. Placed above will be an additional sign of 3-by-3-feet that will read, "Please Drive Safely."

County Roadmaster Dan Crumley said that he hopes the memorial signs will encourage safer driving, as well as being a remembrance to those who died.

"We want people to slow down," said Crumley.

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3:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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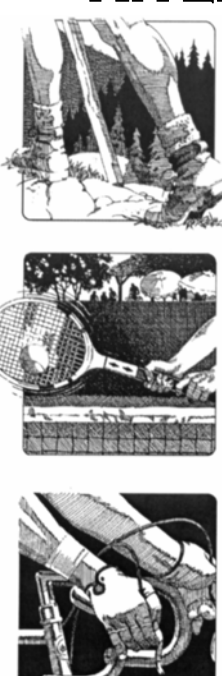
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