

## A job fair, and more



Jeff Ter Har/For The Daily Astorian

Hundreds of Clatsop County high school students on Tuesday attended the second annual career and job fair at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds. The event was organized by Clatsop Economic Development Resources and WorkSource Northwest Oregon. See more photos online at [www.dailyastorian.com](http://www.dailyastorian.com)

## Oregon State working to contain possible norovirus outbreak

Associated Press

CORVALLIS — Oregon State University officials say they are taking steps to contain a possible norovirus outbreak after up to 60 students fell ill with symptoms.

The *Gazette-Times* reported that test results are not yet available to confirm an outbreak, but officials say the nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and fever symptoms are consistent with norovirus. The university said Tuesday it is working

with Benton County health officials to prevent the spread of the highly contagious illness that began last Wednesday.

Bill Emminger from the county environmental health division says the illness does not appear to be connected with any particular location or food-service facility on campus. Most of the students affected have been residents of the dorms.

Oregon State staff members are sanitizing work areas in the dorms and dining halls.

# ‘Pay-for-prayer’ service shut down in Washington

Slippery entrepreneur known for ‘bumvertising’

By NATALIE ST. JOHN  
EO Media Group

OLYMPIA, Wash. — A decade ago, Seattle entrepreneur Ben Rogovy made headlines for inventing the controversial practice of “Bumvertising” — paying the homeless to advertise his businesses. Now, he’s in trouble for using shady business practices that affected people across the country.

Rogovy, 32, used a “pay-for-prayer” service and other deceptive techniques to con as many as 165,000 consumers out of about \$7.8 million dollars, according to the Washington Attorney General’s Office.

The Attorney General’s Office recently shut down three businesses belonging to Rogovy and ordered him to pay back consumers who fell for the scams.

### For-profit churches, fake pastors

The Attorney General’s Office says Rogovy used “systematic deception” to run the for-profit online “Christian Prayer Center” and “Christian National Church.” Through [www.christianprayercenter.com](http://www.christianprayercenter.com) and the Spanish-language sister-site, [www.oracioncristiana.org](http://www.oracioncristiana.org), the prayer center charged \$9 to \$35 to pray for patrons, according to the state.

The prayer center claimed the sites were run by “Pastor John Carlson.” Patrons of the sites even received weekly inspirational emails and other correspondence from Carlson and a “Pastor Eric Johnston.” Though Carlson even had a LinkedIn profile, neither of these people actually existed. According to the Attorney General’s office, the prayer center was actually run by Rogovy’s employees and contractors.

**‘I believe in the power of prayer. What I do not believe in and what I will not tolerate is unlawful businesses that prey upon people.’**

**Bob Ferguson**  
attorney general, Washington state

Testimonials from fictional followers often included stock photos, and “... claimed (CPC) successfully prayed to avoid home foreclosure, deliver a healthy baby, win the lottery, obtain negative results on an HIV test and put cancer into remission,” the state said.

Additionally, the Attorney General’s Office found that people who opted to receive “continued blessings” ended up getting charged on a monthly basis until they caught on and stopped payments.

Between 2011 and 2015, the Christian Prayer Center collected more than \$7 million from 125,000 consumers, resulting in a total of over 400,000 transactions.

Rogovy used similar tactics — including a fictional “Pastor Parker Robinson” — to run the prayer center.

“I believe in the power of prayer,” Attorney General Bob Ferguson said in a press release. “What I do not believe in and what I will not tolerate is unlawful businesses that prey upon people — taking advantage of their faith or their need for help — in order to make a quick buck.”

### Fake government agency

Another online business, Consumer Complaint Agency, promised to advocate on behalf of customers who had bad

experiences with businesses. Instead, the site charged up to \$25 “to do little more than passively forwarding complaints,” the state said. The investigation found that Rogovy used “official”-looking seals and language to make customers think the agency was a government agency, and hinted that it could provide legal assistance, even though it did not employ any attorneys.

Just like the churches, the agency used made-up testimonials and quotes. Consumers didn’t find out how much they’d be charged until after they filed their complaints. When people asked for refunds, the agency threatened them with fees and legal penalties.

From 2011 to 2015, about 40,000 victims, including 1,000 Washingtonians, purchased this service for a total of over \$750,000.

### History of controversial tactics

In 2005, Rogovy, then 22, made national and international headlines after he trademarked the term “bumvertising.”

According to a September 2005 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article, Rogovy is a Mercer Island native who graduated early from University of Washington with a degree in economics. After graduation, Rogovy was trying to get fledgling online

businesses off the ground, and he couldn’t afford to advertise them. He decided to ask homeless people, who were asking for handouts, to tape colored ads for his businesses to their signs. He paid them a few dollars, plus a snack and a drink.

Rogovy, who sometimes referred to the homeless as “bums” and “beggars” received both praise and harsh criticism for his idea. Online articles and state records show that Rogovy has been involved in numerous Washington businesses, many of which were purely Internet-based, and gave vague descriptions of the services they offered. Most are now defunct.

According to the Attorney General’s Office, Rogovy’s actions violate the state Consumer Protection Act, which forbids businesses from making false claims, and the Charitable Solicitations Act, which prohibits churches and charities from using misleading or deceptive statements in any charitable solicitation. In addition to reimbursing consumers, he will be required to pay substantial attorney fees and state penalties, and will be subject to larger fines if he does not comply with the terms of his agreement.

### How to file for reimbursement

People who purchased services from Christian Prayer Service or Oracion Cristiana between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2015 can receive a full refund.

By Friday, all affected consumers will receive an email from Christian Prayer Center alerting them about the opportunity to receive a refund. To be eligible, consumers must file a complaint with the Washington State Attorney General’s Office by June 12

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**Time:** 1:00PM to 4:00PM (AGE GROUP 10U)  
**Location:** Warrenton High School  
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**Fee:** \$10 (FOR NEW PLAYERS)



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