

**FAMILY**

# Washington Law Requires Booster Seats for Kids

(AP) — New rules for parents recently went into effect: Put kids in booster seats when they're passengers in your vehicle until they're 6 years old or weigh 60 pounds.

That new state law was inspired by Walla Walla mother Autumn Alexander Skeen, who thought she was playing by the rules in 1996 when she buckled her 4-year-old son Anton into a seat belt and took off on a road trip.

When Skeen's sport-utility vehicle rolled over on Interstate 82 near Yakima, Anton slipped out of his seat belt and onto the median, where he died.

Skeen channeled her grief into a fight for the new statute, known as Anton's Law.

The seats position children who have outgrown forward-facing baby car seats so that adult-sized lap and shoulder belts fit properly. Without boosters, chil-

dren risk severe injury in a car crash.

Here are the law's new rules for children in vehicles:

—Under 1 year or 20 pounds, the child must be in a rear-facing infant seat;

—Age 1 to 4 or weighing between 20 to 39 pounds, in a forward-facing child-safety seat;

—Age 4 to 6 or weighing 40 to 59 pounds, in a booster seat plus seat belt. Vehicles equipped only with lap belts are exempt as boosters should be used only with lap-shoulder belts;

—Children under 6 or weighing less than 60 pounds must sit in the back seat if the vehicle is equipped with passenger-side air bags that are activated.

Safety seats for infants and younger children have long been required under Washington law, but were not required for children over 3 until Anton's Law was



passed.

The measure was approved in 2000. Enforcement was delayed two years to give parents a chance to learn about booster seats.

A booster-seat ticket carries a penalty of \$86, but judges have the option of dismissing tickets if parents buy a booster within seven days of a violation and can prove it.

While safety experts say most parents are aware of the impor-

ance of using car seats with younger children, statistics show a majority move early school-age children into seat belts before they are tall enough.

Skeen is pushing for a national booster seat law that would mandate better research and standards for young passengers. She also hopes to persuade car manufacturers to build harness systems into seats.

## More Applying for Food Stamps

(AP) — More Oregonians than ever are seeking food stamps and state health coverage. But the Department of Health Services has fewer caseworkers to help them.

The department has 34 vacancies that can't be filled because of a hiring freeze. Meanwhile, the number of Oregonians on food stamps reached a record 368-thousand last month. And about 408,000

Oregonians are covered by the health plan.

Thirty-five-thousand more people have applied for coverage under the Oregon Health Plan, which provides Medicaid coverage for low-income Oregonians.

Employees at DHS are now working on weekends to make a dent in those backlogged applications.

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# Initiative to Boost Oregon's Minimum Wage

(AP) — Petition signatures for a proposed ballot measure to raise Oregon's minimum wage by 40 cents an hour to \$6.90 were filed last Wednesday with the secretary of state's office.

Backers of the initiative said they submitted 91,000 signatures, well over the 66,786 signatures of registered voters needed to put the measure on the Nov. 5 ballot.

Officials will now start

checking the validity of signatures.

The deadline was Friday for turning in signatures to put measures on the general election ballot. About a dozen measures are expected to qualify this year, down from the 18 initiatives on the November 2000 ballot.

The wage floor has not increased since 1999, when it reached a top of \$6.50 under a three-step raise approved by

voters in 1996.

Besides boosting the minimum to \$6.90, the new initiative would adjust the figure annually to account for inflation.

State Rep. Diane Rosenbaum, D-Portland, a sponsor of the proposal, said Oregon had the highest minimum wage on the West Coast after the 1996 vote and now has the lowest.

Washington state's mini-

mum wage is \$6.90, while California's is \$6.75.

Two other states have minimum pay rates higher than Oregon, according to the U.S. Labor Department. They are Connecticut at \$6.70 and Massachusetts at \$6.75.

An organization representing mostly small businesses, though, says a higher minimum wage will not help Oregon business as the state tries to recover from a recession.

# Soul Chain Links Soul Sisters

continued from Metro

McDonald said that ever since they got the idea, everything happened how it was supposed to.

"God answered my question through my craft," she says. "You have to be passionate about something, to find your niche."

What about the name? Soul Chain? Soul, because the boutique is in northeast Portland, what many have come to call the Soul of Portland. Chain, because before you crochet anything, the first run of stitches you make is called a chain.

"See," McDonald says, holding a red row of finely looped knots in front of her. "It's very therapeutic. Whatever is bothering you is all crocheted up into what you are working on."

Passion for design pays off in beautiful, original pieces. Everything is hand-made. Intricately designed tops that hug the body. Full length gowns in black and red. Bikinis. Even toe thongs adorned with beads and ornate stitching. The items can be discreet or a little revealing, but always one of a kind.

"We create things, we don't use patterns. Whatever we think we want to make, we just envision it, draw it and make it. That's what makes it so original."

The designs almost purr. The juxtaposition of a yarn knit on a red bikini must be seen and perhaps felt to be truly appreciated.

"We have a steady clientele that really like our things," says McDonald.

She says at first, when the women had very little inventory, it was difficult to keep the store stocked. "I would put dresses in the window and they would be gone the next day," McDonald says.

They are trying to catch up. Even their mother contributes to the diverse collection, making

blankets and baby items. Those are her favorite. She doesn't have any problem finding good homes for the finely crafted items. Audrey has twenty-four grandkids. "I've made blankets and throw covers and spreads for all of them," she says, "I be busy."

Black prefers to craft skirt suits, halter tops and skirt outfits. "I like making things with little accessories to go with them," she says.

On the recent Last Thursday Art Walk, a curious patron pages

*We create things, we don't use patterns. Whatever we think we want to make, we just envision it, draw it and make it. That's what makes it so original.*

—Mona McDonald

through a book of designs and remarks on gray sweater with blue trim, flared sleeves, and matching hat. "That's one of mine," says Black, nodding her head as if remembering an old friend. Indeed, the sisters say some of the items are difficult to say good-bye to.

"I shock myself," says McDonald, "I make things that can be really hard to let go of."

The women use a colorful assortment of yarns, mostly imported from Germany and France. They like to use materials that are a little different. Microfiber cotton, deco ribbon, chenille that feels like velvet. Beads come from neighboring shops on Alberta.

The sisters also consign with local artists. Handmade jewelry fills a viewing case and small satch-

els hang delicately from hooks.

"If we found something that would fit in our shop, we would put it in here. I think it's nice if we can help other artists," McDonald says.

The clothes have been such a hit that the busy sisters are almost having a hard time keeping up with demand.

"We need more hands," says McDonald, spinning out a crocheted spandex cotton bikini.

A full length dress may take a week to make. If it is a real tight stitch, it may take two. Tops can take two to six hours. A hat may take thirty minutes.

Prices vary, and depend on the fiber used and the size of the stitch.

Tops average \$62. Dresses start at \$100 and go up from there. They ask for 50% down on commissioned items and the rest of the balance upon completion.

"People say our prices are modest," says McDonald.

She adds that patrons shouldn't be discouraged if a too small top in the window catches their fancy.

"Sometimes women walk by and notice the skimpy items in the window and say to themselves 'I would never fit into that little thing,'" she says.

Since everything the sisters make is custom made, finding the right size, and style for that matter, is not a problem.

Future plans include a catalogue of designs as well as an internet site. They also hope to sell yarn and even offer crocheting classes to the public. McDonald may even introduce a designer line of linen to a growing list of products.

But for now, the sisters, mom, and friends, have more than enough work to keep their hands busy. With each passing day, another link in the chain.

"I eat, sleep, and breathe crocheting," McDonald explains. "I love this store and everything happening on Alberta."



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