



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Humboldt Elementary Extreme Makeover

More than 250 volunteers of all ages take a lunch break Saturday between revitalizing Humboldt Elementary in north Portland by painting the entire interior, installing a garden into a previously empty lot and cleaning up the school grounds.

Payday Lenders Close Shop

(AP) — Payday lender Advance America, Cash Advance Centers Inc., said it is closing its stores in Oregon because it is no longer economically viable to operate in the state.

The closures follow a state imposed a 36 percent annual interest rate cap and other regulations on the short-term, high-rate consumer loans.

The new laws took effect in July and allow payday and car title lenders to charge a \$10 origination fee per \$100 loaned, though no more than \$30 for a loan of any amount.

Loans must be for at least 31 days and can carry an annual interest rate of 36 percent. Fees included, lenders can charge the equivalent of an annual interest rate of about 154 percent for a 31-day loan — far less than the 500 percent rates common before the law took effect.

Advance, which is based in Spartansburg, S.C., said its Oregon centers have generated no gross profit for the six months ended June 30. The company said it planned to write off most of the value of its receivables in Oregon, about \$10.8 million.

Low Wage Workers Get Raise

Effective with New Year

Oregon has announced a 15-cents-per-hour cost-of-living increase, effective at the end of this year, for minimum-wage workers.

The increase to \$7.95 an hour will make Oregon's minimum wage the third highest in the nation, slightly behind California and Massachusetts, with minimum wage rates of \$8 an hour.

Significantly higher than the federal minimum wage of \$5.85 an hour, low-wage workers in Oregon still suffer disproportionately, according to state leaders.

A recent report from the Oregon Center for Public Policy showed that average pay shot up by 10 percent over inflation between early 2003 and early 2007 among industry professions with the highest pay.

In the 25 lowest-paying industries, by contrast, the average pay raise was just one percent over inflation, noted Dan Gardner, the state's labor commissioner

who helped lead the successful 2002 ballot-measure effort linking minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index. Only the highest-paid fifth of workers saw their earnings rise faster than inflation during the first three years of the expansion.

The rest of the workforce, the bottom 80 percent, saw their wages fall behind inflation. A minimum-wage worker in Oregon supporting a three-person family by working full-time, year-round in 2007 will not escape poverty. Such a worker will earn \$16,536 in 2007, \$634 less than the 2007 poverty line for a family of three.

Senior Center Provides Relief for Hungry Seniors

The Elm Court Senior Center, previously located inside the downtown YWCA, has been relocated to space inside the adjoining St. Francis Apartments, 1025 S.W. Main St.

A \$200,000 grant from PDC was leveraged with Loaves & Fishes capital contributions to assist in relocation and improvement expenses for the new 6,000-square-foot commercial space.

The new facility will continue to expand service to the immediate neighborhood that has 931 units of low-income housing for seniors. The center served 50,354 meals in the Elm Court dining room and another 88,843 meals in the immediate neighborhood during the past year.

fabulous fall

SEASONS CHANGE, FASHION FOLLOWS SUIT WITH A DRAMATIC PLAY ON PROPORTION.

CHARLES GRAY Plaid cape jacket, grey/black, xs-xl; 290.00. WOMYN Pencil skirt with flattering seaming detail, jet (black), 0-14; 150.00. Individualist.

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