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Week in The Review

Gas Prices Fall near \$2

The price of gas in Oregon fell another 19 cents in the last week to \$2.03 a gallon on Tuesday, the lowest price since February 2005, according to AAA. The national average for gasoline has fallen to \$1.89 a gallon, as crude oil prices continue to sink amid the global economic slowdown.

Employment Office Rush

Unemployment in Oregon has gotten so bad that the state Employment Department has put more people on the job handling claims. The department has added 43 people to handle the growing load of jobless claims, and it plans to add 20 more by the end of the week.

Jobless Checks Extended

Jarred by new jobless alarms, Congress raced to approve legislation Thursday to keep unemployment checks flowing through the December and into the New Year for a million or more laid-off Americans whose benefits are running out.

U S Moves to Thaw Credit

The government, still struggling to manage a severe financial crisis, unveiled two new programs Tuesday that will provide \$800 billion to try to help unfreeze the market for consumer debt from home mortgages to credit cards.

Home Prices in Free Fall

The home price plunge is on a record pace, according to a new national real estate markets report. The S&P Case-Shiller Home Price index recorded a 16.6% decline in the third quarter compared with the same period a year ago. That eclipsed the previous record of 15.1% set during the second quarter.

Governor to Cut Budget

Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire unveiled emergency plans Tuesday to carve \$260 million from this year's budget. The state is facing a deficit of about \$5 billion through mid-2011.

Police Fear More Victims

Beaverton Police fear an accused rapist may have more potential victims. Officers said they found assorted pairs of women's underwear inside the apartment of 21-year-old Silvestre Cervantes-Avila. He's in jail on charges of raping a woman on Nov. 10 and keeping her underwear.

Pivotal Civil War Match up

Oregon State and Oregon meet Saturday in Corvallis for the annual grudge match Civil War football game, which this year is for even higher stakes. If OSU wins, the Beavers go to the Rose Bowl.

Economy Jolts Food Programs



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Don Giza, 62, meets with other seniors while waiting for lunch at the Elm Court Center, a Loaves and Fishes meal site. Giza counts on the lunches to help him survive on a limited income.

Food banks, meal sites feel the pinch

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

On a brisk morning at the Elm Court Center, a downtown meal site for the elderly, seniors chat it up over cups of coffee and newspapers while the clank of utensils from the kitchen echo through the room.

Elm Court is one of over 30 meal sites in the Portland metro area operated by Loaves and Fishes, a non-profit which provides free meals for seniors.

Although the organization still serves 5,000 meals a day, it joins other non-profits feeling the pinch as the economy staggers.

People are losing jobs and being squeezed by rising heating, gas and healthcare costs and are looking to cut

expenses. One area people are cutting back is perhaps the most essential: food. For many, a nutritious meal is becoming a luxury out of reach, and are looking for help.

Susan Gilson, the food site manager, said she has seen a number of new faces in recent months.

"I'm certainly hearing more people talk about the cost of food and rent," she said.

Seniors at Elm Court say that they've been hit by the recent economic downturn. Some expect their heating bills to skyrocket this winter, and have to rely heavily on the center for meals. Some come in everyday.

"My income goes lower each month," said Arthur Spencer, a 70-year old, who explained that the services provided by



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Food baskets for struggling residents are packed by volunteers at the Carpenters Hall on North Lombard Street. The food bank has been operating for 25 years, serving 500 families each month. Donations are welcome.

Loaves and Fishes have helped him stay afloat.

"I'd rob Safeway," said 62-year-old Don Giza, with a laugh when asked what he would do without the service.

Loaves and Fishes faces uncertain times, according to its spokesperson Julie Piper Finley.

The organization has seen a 15 percent increase by local residents seeking its services and a drop in donations.

"I think a lot of seniors have been struggling with the economy as a whole," said Finley. Seniors are particularly vul-

continued ▼ on page A3

Campus Scholar Turns Life Around

On path to recovery, she helps others

Amber Parke has done a lot of work in the recovery community, which she knows first-hand. She helps women coming out of the prison system integrate back into the community.

"I took quite a bit from society," Parke said. "I felt it was time to give back."

Today, the north Portland resident is an accomplished student at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus where she attends full time and volunteers as a student affairs leader.

A second-year sociology student, she was just elected as one of 400 recipients nationwide, and the only student from Oregon, through the Coca-Cola Two-Year Colleges Scholarship Program for individuals who have demonstrated academic success and participated in community service. As a result, she will receive \$1,000 toward her college expenses.

"I didn't realize it was such a big deal until I got a letter from U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith," she said.

Only a few years ago, Parke was trying to turn her life around in Project Independence, a special program for single parents, displaced homemakers and women returning to college.

A single parent with a 16-year-old daughter and a self-described recovering addict, she joined the group in winter of 2006 after 13 years of being away from college, which included a three-year stint in prison for various property crimes.

Project Independence is a tuition-free program that provides information and



Amber Parke attends classes at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus in north Portland. The self-described recovering addict has turned her life around through the help of PCC and a group called Project Independence, which supports single parents and displaced homemakers.

access to a variety of educational and training opportunities for women who are on the road to becoming economically self-sufficient.

"I'm open about my background," Parke said. "I felt I needed to speak for people who come after me. I wanted to talk about my own experiences and hope it might help somebody who is in a similar situation. I'd really just like to be a change agent and educate people about felons; how people can change."

Parke says the help she received from instructors at PCC has impacted her life for the better, giving her the courage to explore her interests.

"There are a lot of really good mentors here; they believed in me and showed me I can do things," she said.

She credits Kendi Esary, the student leadership coordinator on the Cascade Campus, with showing her that she could be involved on campus and make a difference at PCC, too.

Esary said it wasn't hard to inspire Parke, because she was eager to learn.

"I am thrilled that Amber received this scholarship, but I can't say that I am surprised," Esary said. "Her performance as a student and a leader, both on campus and in the community, are a testament to how education can change a person's life."

Parke also credits Debbie Stone of Project Independence in getting her acclimated to school and finding her niche.

"Project Independence really made me feel part of PCC and gave me the support to keep me in school," Parke added. "Also, student government was key as it made me feel connected. That's the number one thing; feeling connected."

For more information on Project Independence, call the Women's Resource Center at 503-978-5249.