

Helping Make Ends Meet

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

also now offers two tiers of discounts for customers who are at 60 percent—and 30 percent—median family income of Portland, respectively. One of the changes the utility recently made was to use city median family income, rather than go by state measures to better reflect local needs.

Though the program has been around since 1995, effective July 1 of last year, its services were enhanced under City Commissioner Nick Fish. The bureau is currently under the direction of City Commissioner Amanda Fritz.

That was also the time when the main customer service building of the utility changed from being downtown—which often incurred complaints of having to pay for parking or lack of accessibility for public transport from customers—to their new location at 664 N Tillamook St. Now there’s free parking and it’s along the Max Yellow Line and 35 bus line.

In addition, the agency has launched a partnership with Home Forward, Multnomah County’s housing authority, to provide up to \$500 in rental assistance annually to income-qualified renters living in a multi-family dwelling and at risk of eviction.

“Many people who live in

apartments never get a water bill or water and sewer bill. So how do you give a discount to someone who doesn’t receive a bill? We figured out a pathway to do that for people that are in crisis, that are risk of eviction, by partnering with Home Forward,” said Portland Water Bureau Public Information Officer Jaymee Cuti.

SEI, which is one of seven community partners the Water Bureau works with, helps their clients get connected to benefits such as these for families who are struggling financially.

“Really we try and prioritize making people who are coming in for energy assistance more of a one stop shop,” SEI Energy Pro-

gram Manager Megan McGinnis said. “If someone’s coming in, [we] just have them bring that water bill with them. And then we can enroll them in their bill discount as well. Kind of saves them an extra trip.”

McGinnis added that SEI does this by completing the verification of income and other qualification measures on behalf of the Water Bureau.

“[W]e try to make sure that our staff, before providing any form of energy assistance, are having a more comprehensive conversation about what might be creating that need,” explained SEI Director of Community and Family Programs Department Sahaan McKelvey. “We’ll be as thorough as we can... trying to get behind some of the root causes of why a family may be struggling with being able to [pay their] utility bills.”

McKelvey said he’s very appreciative of the steps that local agencies like the Portland Water Bureau are taking to create assistance opportunities for people, but that there’s more work that needs to be done for multi-family units “to make that system more ideal and accessible as it needs to be for the families that are trying to tap into it.”

Portland Water Bureau Financial Assistance Program Manager Corbett White, who has worked at Portland Water Bureau for 27 years, now oversees two other employees tasked with assisting cus-

tomers with financial assistance inquiries—additional positions that were part of the enhancements that were enacted last year—when before only one person did the job.

She recalled a case where a woman was devastated by becoming involved with the payday loan system.

“She was a single mom facing her water being shut off. And she said it’s not that I don’t make money, it’s just that they get the money before I do. And I was able to turn it around for her,” White said.


She added that it’s those moments of positively impacting customers’ lives that gets her excited about coming into work each morning.

“There’s a lot of people out there that are having a rough time financially. If they give us a call, there’s ways for us to help and that’s the message that we want.”

White said there’s two numbers for Portland Water Bureau customer service inquiries: a general line at 503-823-7770 where payment arrangements, such as monthly installments, or an explanation of the bill can be provided. Inquiries requiring more attention from the financial assistance specialists’ line can be reached at 503-865-4357. Customers can also receive service by visiting a partnering organization, like SEI, or visiting the utility in person at 664 N Tillamook St., or online at portlandoregon.gov/water/.



PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Fabiola Casas (left) and Anna McDonald serve the public as financial assistance program specialists for the Portland Water Bureau, positions that have been added to the staff at Portland Water Bureau as part of an enhancement to its Financial Assistance Program.



Together, we do good things.

This page is sponsored by the Oregon Lottery



CALENDAR

June 2019

MONDAY TUESDAY WEDNESDAY THURSDAY FRIDAY SATURDAY SUNDAY

<p>○ 17</p> <p>World Juggler’s Day Eat Your Vegetables Day</p>	<p>18</p> <p>Chris Van Allsburg born, 1949 International Picnic Day</p>	<p>19</p> <p>Garfield Debuted in 1978 Juneteenth Tasmanian Devil Debuted in 1954</p>	<p>20</p> <p>American Eagle Day Ice Cream Soda Day</p>	<p>21</p> <p>First Day of Summer</p>	<p>22</p> <p>US Department of Justice Established in 1870</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Theodore Taylor born, 1922 Typewriter Patented In 1868</p>
<p>24</p> <p>World U.F.O. Day (also July 2) 1st modern UFO sighting (by Kenneth Arnold)</p>	<p>☾ 25</p> <p>LEON Day - LEON is NOEL spelled backwards. It means six months until Christmas</p>	<p>26</p> <p>Bicycle Patented In 1819 National Chocolate Pudding Day Toothbrush Invented In 1498</p>	<p>27</p> <p>Captain Kangaroo (Bob Keeshan) born 1927 Helen Keller Born in 1880</p>	<p>28</p> <p>Paul Bunyan Day</p>	<p>29</p> <p>First iPhone released, 2007 Camera Day</p>	<p>30</p> <p>Meteor Day National Organization of Women Founded In 1966</p>