

# IRS tax scam ring busted

## Scheme netted an estimated \$2 million

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Treasury Department has arrested five people in Miami accused of posing as IRS agents in telephone calls and demanding immediate payment of overdue taxes, a scheme that netted them an estimated \$2 million, a top official said Tuesday.

J. Russell George, who heads the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration office, said Tuesday that the five defrauded about 1,500 people.

The IRS has called similar impersonators the largest such scam in agency history. George said overall, 1.2 million Americans have reported receiving such calls, and around 6,400 of them have reported being cheated

out of \$36.5 million.

The callers pose as IRS or Treasury agents and demand immediate payment of back taxes or other fees, threatening arrest if they don't. George said some scammers demand that people pay using iTunes or other prepaid debit cards.

The five arrested had their victims quickly wire them money — something George said the IRS does not do.

Sahil Patel of Tatamy, Pennsylvania, was sentenced last July to more than 14 years in prison for leading a similar scheme that prosecutors said victimized people in nearly every state.

The five arrested Monday were charged with wire fraud and conspiracy to commit wire fraud, George said.

He identified them as Jennifer Valerino Nunez, Dennis Delgado Caballero, Arnoldo Perez Mirabal, Yaritza Espinosa Diaz, and Roberto Fontanella Caballero.

A senior official with the office said they began investigating those arrested Monday after one victim complained to the Senate Aging Committee.

That official said the five all live in Miami and are Cuban nationals. He spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details he wasn't authorized to discuss publicly.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who chairs the Aging panel, said in a statement that her committee contacted Treasury investigators after hearing from a woman whose distraught husband had an auto accident after receiving a w call instructing him to wire \$2,000.

# CONNER: Made her way back to Pendleton in the 1980s

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As a student at University of Portland, she competed in downhill and slalom skiing with Ski-ente club. She graduated with a degree in administration of justice and worked at the PSU School of Social Work. Because of the federal Indian Relocation Act, she moved to several large cities for employment. In Colorado Springs, Colorado, she worked as a secretary for a Jewish auction house; in Albuquerque, she worked odd jobs; and in Los Angeles, she was employed by an athletic club.

Eventually, after two divorces, she made her way back to Pendleton in the 1980s where she raised her nine children and worked for a time with the Tribes' Children & Family Services. El Shoura said her mother encouraged each child to find their own way. El Shoura, who is now Muslim, received no pushback from her mother, who was an elder with the Tutuilla Presbyterian Church.

Conner camped each year at the teepee village at Round-Up and also at the Wallowa Tamkaliks celebration, which her brother Taz founded. Last year at Tamkaliks, Conner was named as the oldest rider at age 81.

"She had an ornery horse, but it didn't faze her," El Shoura said. "She handled it like she always does."

After the interment on

Monday, El Shoura, Conner, Jones and about 80 other family members made their way into the longhouse in Mission for the traditional greeting of the family. They slowly made their way past non-family members who encircled the large room, stopping for hugs and handshakes.

One person at the gathering, Jennifer Karson Engum, a cultural anthropologist for the CTUIR who had listened to oral history from Conner, said the elder knew how to mesh her Indian traditions with modern American culture. Engum said she often ran into Conner at the Roundup Athletic Club after the woman had finished water aerobics. Conner, she said, would take earthy-smelling dried root used in sweat lodges into the RAC sauna.

"She was living her identity wherever she went," Engum said.

El Shoura said she will miss sharing sushi and movie nights with her mom. She and her husband are adopting Sully, Conner's Jack Russell terrier. She and the rest of the family can't quite wrap their minds around the fact that they'll never see one of Conner's warm smiles again.

"It's hard to let her go," said El Shoura. "We wanted to keep her around forever."

Contact Kathy Aney at [kaney@eastoregonian.com](mailto:kaney@eastoregonian.com) or call 541-966-0810.



Etta Conner poses wearing her Indian regalia as a young women.

# SHERIFF: Served city with a tort claim notice

Continued from 1A

DeFord in Grant County Circuit Court, seeking to obtain public records.

"For the past two months, Plaintiffs have made routine public records requests from defendants," the complaint states. "At nearly every turn, however, plaintiffs have met a stone wall of resistance."

The lawsuit seeks public email, phone and social media records; information about the number of concealed handgun licenses

issued, crimes reported and arrests; arrest reports where Palmer was the primary arresting officer; communications with Salvatore Cascuccio, Fred Grant Kelly and the Oregon Firearms Federation; reports concerning the investigation and arrest of Scott Willingham; and reports about the 2015 hazardous materials response to a possible contaminated envelope received by Palmer.

Palmer, DeFord and county counsel Ron Yockim

did not respond to requests for comment. Boyd said Hostetter Law Group is not representing Palmer in this lawsuit.

Palmer submitted a lengthy public records request to the city of John Day before serving the city with a tort claim notice, which serves as notice of his intent to sue and protects his right to do so in the future.

John Day City Manager Peggy Gray said Monday the city had not been notified that the sheriff had actually filed the lawsuit.

# BEAR: ODFW has documented five bear attacks

Continued from 1A

he was treated and released.

"I give this young man some pretty good kudos," Pallis said. "Anyone who can fight off a bear the way he did ... that's an undertaking in and of itself."

Pallis, however, added that Thomas was lucky. He said the incident underscores the need for hunters to have a partner with them in the wilderness in case of an accident or, in this case, an attack.

"It's always something you have to consider," Pallis said. "Accidents can happen, and animals can attack and hurt you."

Michelle Dennehy, spokeswoman with the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, said bear attacks are extremely rare in Oregon, but not unheard of. The agency has documented five incidents, none of which have been fatal. Two of the previous cases — one in Douglas County, and the other in Coos Bay — came under similar circumstances, where a wounded animal came back to attack a hunter.

"This is not the first time this has happened," Dennehy said.

She said hunters need to approach wildlife carefully,

especially if those animals have been shot and injured.

Dennehy said they are not sure what happened to the bear that attacked Thomas.

Oregon is home to between 25,000 and 30,000

black bears, according to ODFW. Spring bear hunting season runs through May 31 in northeast Oregon.

Contact George Plaven at [gplaven@eastoregonian.com](mailto:gplaven@eastoregonian.com) or 541-966-0825.

## STUDENT OF THE WEEK

**Josseline Monez**  
Ukiah High School




Ukiah High School junior Josseline Monez is selected as an Outstanding Student because of her winning personality and her attention to details in every aspect of her high school life. Josseline has participated in sports throughout the year, and was a valuable member of volleyball and basketball teams. In classwork, she always submits assignments completely and on time. She makes a point to speak to everyone, at school or in the community, in a kind and caring way. Josseline is a person who demonstrates enthusiasm for life. Thank you, Josseline, for being outstanding.

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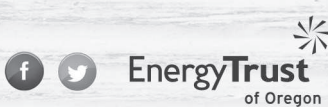
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