

County cracks down on online lodging tax scofflaws

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

There are 110 vacation homes in Wallowa County listed on Airbnb’s online site alone, not to mention other sites. How many of them are legal?

Not all, according to Wallowa County Treasurer Shonelle Dutcher. She and her assistant Carolyn Doherty are tracking operators who have not followed the correct procedures when setting up their lodging businesses.

The duo is searching the Internet, noting descriptions and pictures of Wallowa County offerings and hunting down the operators.

It’s a labor- intensive project, but they are aided by residents who anonymously report the operation of unregistered lodgings.

Besides Airbnb, there are tripping.com, FlipKey, HomeAway, VRBO and others.

Wallowa County Commissioners recently explained their requirements to one operator who had been renting a room for four years without paying county transient lodging taxes. The operator was astonished when she received a letter requiring her to pay taxes extending back four years and assessing penalties amounting to approximately \$800.

Although the operator

claimed she was simply ignorant of the law, not a scofflaw, commissioners voted unanimously to require payment of the fees.

Operators who use Airbnb and others may have flown under the radar for some time, but states, counties and cities across the country are cracking down.

Wallowa County Treasurer Dutcher has sent out approximately 20 letters recently, informing owners that they owe back taxes and penalties and must account for their businesses. All but three operators identified have responded, she said, most having paid their fees immediately upon receiving the letter.

Other operator responsibilities may include obtaining a conditional use permit from the planning department, registering with the health department or double-checking homeowner insurance to guarantee coverage.

Airbnb takes a three percent fee that provides some liability insurance, and in some select cities or states contract to pay state fees, the responsibility for meeting legal obligations to operate a lodging business is generally on the operator. It’s not all a case of cities and counties playing catch-up. Online booking conglomerates may be a new wrinkle in the fabric of lodging, but many cit-

ies and counties already have ordinances broad enough to regulate them.

Wallowa County, for instance, has had a Motel Room Tax ordinance that has covered almost every rental situation since 1994. That ordinance specifically includes B&Bs, Motels, RV parking spaces and vacation cabins as well as simple bed rental.

Transient lodging taxes to Wallowa County amount to five percent of rent charged and are due quarterly. Every operator is responsible to keep records and accounting books to show the accuracy of their payments. Late penalties of two percent per month can be charged along with interest of

two percent per month. Additionally, a fine can be assessed for violation of any provisions of the ordinance.

Both Joseph and Enterprise cities also assess a three percent transient lodging tax fee on top of the county fee.

The money collected through the Transient Lodging Tax at the county level is paid out to the Wallowa County Health Care District Emergency Services Department, Wallowa County Search and Rescue Unit, Wallowa County Solid Waster program, tourism, recreation, economic development, city or county parks or other worthy county projects and the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce.

Wallowa man gets 50-month sentence

Officials spend more than a year on Carper’s trial

By Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

“It feels good to get this one done,” said a smiling Mona Williams, Wallowa County’s district attorney, from behind her desk.

Baltimore Carper, 36, Wallowa, was sentenced Oct. 2 to 50 months with the Oregon Department of Corrections after he reached a plea deal with the Wallowa County District Attorney’s office. Carper pleaded guilty to a dozen assorted felonies and misdemeanors.

The case involved the cooperative efforts between Williams’ office, the sheriff’s office, Enterprise Police department and Oregon State Police.

When Williams was first notified by Montana law enforcement in April 2016 that one Baltimore Carper and his wife, Amanda, had burglarized a home there and were likely headed for Wallowa County, where he had inherited property, she had no idea that law enforcement would spend more than a year and tax their resources to the fullest.

The call from Montana warned the Carpers had stolen firearms, a trailer and a

COURT BEAT

Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Law enforcement officers went out to the area of Carper’s land. During surveillance from a neighboring property, they noted the trailer’s presence.

Carper was apprehended after leaving the property with a van and the trailer and parking it alongside the road and walking to the barn of neighbor’s property.

Officers could see a firearm in the van, and when Carper returned, he was arrested for being in possession of stolen property. On examination, the stolen firearm was an illegal “sawed-off” firearm.

During a standard search while impounding the van, the officers found an additional illegal sawed off shotgun and subsequently recovered most of the stolen firearms and other stolen items from Montana.

Although Williams charged Carper with possession of stolen items and possession of the illegal weapons, he eventually was sent to Montana to face those charges. Williams didn’t intend to press charges as she did not figure to see Carper again.

To Williams’ surprise, Carper promptly returned to the area after being cut loose by Montana authorities.

“Then, things started dis-

appearing, so that’s when I went to the grand jury and they indicted him on the two sawed-off firearms,” Williams said.

“We started with that case and went from there to the point we had 14 separate cases against him,” she added.

Carper and his wife are admitted drug addicts, at the time, willing to do anything to fuel their habit. Because Carper sold the land he inherited, he and his wife were able to post bail multiple times as they were released and arrested yet again.

Some of the charges were filed six to eight months after the incident occurred because the perpetrator was unknown at the time of the theft.

In one case, a Boise couple had their raft trailer stolen and the gas siphoned from their truck during a Grande Ronde rafting trip. The trailer was later recovered by law enforcement at Carper’s residence.

As officers began to search the area, they noted items reported stolen from the Lostine cemetery and electric tools.

“So now, all these thefts and burglaries we’ve got reports on — we now know who did it,”

Williams said. “Everything fell into place.”

That was just one of many brushes the Carpers had with the law. Charges ranged from aggravated theft, burglary, meth possession and delivery and others, including a child neglect charge, resulting in the loss of their children to the Department of Human Services.

By mid-2017, Baltimore Carper had exhausted his resources and was in Umatilla County Jail to stay until his October sentencing.

Because of the significant amounts of bail forfeited each time either he or his wife were released and subsequently rearrested, Williams was able to design her offer to allow Carper’s victims to promptly get their restitution.

“What usually happens in these cases is that restitution is ordered, but the victims may get it by dollars per month — if they ever get it. In this case, every victim is made whole.”

Williams was glad to put a lid on Carper’s capers. She said that only two of Carper’s 14 charges at court were dismissed: A speeding ticket and a contempt charge for committing more criminal acts while out on bail.

LIBRARY

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The foundation board has dealt with numerous state-required deadlines in the process of getting the district on the ballot and members say they are grateful to cities for their quick response.

“I am so excited that the cities were willing and able to meet the deadlines necessary,” said Rohla.

“The most important thing to remember is that they were not voting to create the library district. They were voting to allow the citizens of their cities the right to vote for themselves whether or not to have a district.”

Wallowa County Commissioners took the first formal step of putting the Library District on the May ballot last Monday, by approving the “initiation order” required under Oregon law.

Many volunteers will be necessary to make the new PAC successful, according to Rohla.

Opportunities include becoming an officer to help run the PAC or raise funds; fundraising; phone calling or knocking on doors to remind residents to get their ballots in; helping with graphic design, messaging and media contact; coordinating public meetings and coffees to educate voters; speaking to service clubs such as Rotary and Lions; and writing letters to the editor.

Contact Wilburn at autumnwilburn@hotmail.com.

The foundation board is not set to meet until after the first of the year because the work to be done now must be completed by the PAC volunteers.

“As soon as the PAC officers are chosen and people have signed up to volunteer, town halls and other meetings will be able to take place,” Rohla said.



PET OF THE WEEK

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Cooper is an 11-year old English Collie/German Shepherd rescue dog. Although advanced in years he still ensures that delivery drivers know that his home is off-limits to their presence.

For his many friends, he always brings one of his special toys to the door as a gift to let them know he appreciates their visit. His parents, Christina and Steve, are proud of his attention to duty and attentiveness to friends.

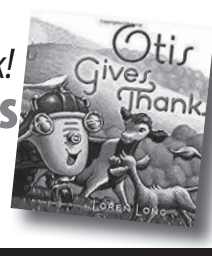
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By Loren Long



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