

Oregon families to receive \$134 million more in food benefits

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) announced that more than 351,000 students receiving free meals from Oregon schools will get additional food benefits for groceries during the school closure.

Households will receive food benefits equivalent to the cost of one lunch and one breakfast for each eligible student — \$5.70 per normal school day for the months of March, April, May and June.

Beginning in June, these additional benefits will be automatically deposited for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households to their existing Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) accounts on their regular issuance date. Benefits are sent out from the 1st to the 9th of the month, based on the last digit of your SSN.

Students who get free school meals but do not receive SNAP benefits will automatically receive an Oregon Trail Card in the mail in the months of June and July. Parents do not need to apply if their children are part of

a school where all students receive free meals.

Families whose children attend participating schools and have experienced significant income loss may have become eligible for free school meals, and there is still time to apply.

Apply online at www.ode.state.or.us/apps/FRLApp/Default or contact your local school.

To find out if your school participates in this program, visit www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/childnutrition/Pages/COVID-19.aspx.

Benefits will be retroactive to March 16 for students who received free and reduced-price meals when schools closed. For newly eligible free or reduced-price students or SNAP households, benefits will start at the beginning of the month they become eligible.

More information about the program is available at govstatus.egov.com/or-dhs-benefits.

DHS will continue to work with federal partners to provide greater assistance to Oregonians in need.

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has also been the area coordinator for past Salvation Army holiday collections, often set up at local retail locations during the holiday season.

"Having run two Christmas-time Red Kettle drives, I saw the potential for helping people by doing a similar thing," he said. "There is an urgency in the financial needs of those who, through no fault of their own, have lost their ability to provide the essentials for their families."

The pandemic has disrupted the lives of thousands of Florence area residents, which prompted Spayd to work with Oregon Pacific Bank to set up an account for distribution to those who need financial support at this time.

"Thus, 'Christmas in June' was born," he said. "One of my first objectives was to figure a way to get the money to people who need it most, and in a timely fashion. We are starting this campaign Monday, June 1, and I wanted to be able to pay out the money starting on day one."

"The bank approved my

loan and, with some early donations from friends, we are starting with a Line of Credit of approximately \$15,000. Every day during the month of June, as we collect the funds, we will deposit that money into the account and be able to draw on the available funds each day."

There are some requirements for receiving funds from this effort. Among those requirements is assuring the funds are dispersed to individuals who live locally and are being financially impacted by the pandemic.

"You must show proof through photo identification that you are a resident of Florence or at least can show that you have, or have had, employment in Florence," Spayd explained. "If you live in the surrounding communities, you may qualify if your employment was in Florence."

In addition, self-employed residents will need to show proof of business via business license or business card with a Florence address, and be able to verify that they lost their job on or after Feb. 1 as a result of the financial restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

There is also an opportunity for those wishing to assist Spayd by staffing the donation sites that are going to be available for community contributions.

"For all the people in our community who want to help, here's the best way to assure that the most people will be helped: You can make a financial contribution to the cause or you can volunteer at one of our collection stations located at our local grocery stores. If you want to become more involved, I need coordinators to help with scheduling volunteers," Spayd said.

Volunteers will be manning collection points through the month of June, Monday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Collection sites will be located at the local Fred Meyer, Grocery Outlet, Safeway and Bi-Mart.

"If you do the math, I need 40 hours of bell ringing every day — or 240 hours each week," Spayd said. "There are lots of opportunities to help your neighbors and your community."

Spayd said the Christmas in June program is his way of contributing to the betterment of the community, adding that he realiz-

es not everyone will want to become as personally involved in fundraising as he is

"Our goal is to raise \$100,000.00 during the month of June," he said. "We will be distributing checks for \$500 to deserving individuals who have had their income drastically reduced, some to zero. By achieving our fundraising goal, we will be able to help 200 people in the City of Florence during the month of June. This will be a tremendous boost to our economy and help get Florence back to the wonderful place we all know and love."

Interviews to obtain funds will be conducted Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Florence Elks Lodge #1585, located at 1686 12th St. Entrance to the interview room is on the south side of the Elks building.

To schedule an interview to receive funds from this effort, or to volunteer, call Spayd at 541-991-6139.

To contribute directly to the Christmas in June program, send a check to "Christmas in June," P.O. Box 1041, Florence, Ore., 97439.

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