

City of Cottage Grove issues tax scam warning

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Tax season is in full swing, which means criminals will go to great lengths to separate taxpayers from their money, identity or anything of value that is within their reach.

Scammers may offer seemingly legitimate “tax services” that are actually designed to steal an identity and tax refund.

Often times, criminals will lure victims in with an offer of larger write-offs or refunds. Such scams might include fake websites and tax forms that look like they belong to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in order to trick unsuspecting taxpayers into providing personal information.

Due to the rise in data breaches, it is recommended to always take steps to minimize the risk of identity theft and other online-related crimes; this is especially important this time of the year.

Below are some warning signs to look for and basic precautions one can take to minimize risk and avoid becoming a victim.

Warning Signs of an Online Tax Scam

- An email or link requesting personal and/

or financial information, such as your name, social security number, bank or credit card account numbers or any additional security-related information.

- Emails containing various forms of threats

Often times, criminals will lure victims in with an offer of larger write-offs or refunds. Such scams might include fake websites and tax forms that look like they belong to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

or consequences if no response is received, such as additional taxes or blocking access to your funds.

- Emails from the IRS or federal agencies. The IRS will not contact anyone via email.

- Emails containing exciting offers, tax refunds, incorrect spelling, grammar or odd phrasing throughout.

- Emails discussing “changes to tax laws.” These email scams typically include a downloadable document (usually in PDF format) that purports to explain the new tax laws.

However, unbeknownst to many, these downloads are almost always populated with malware that, once downloaded, will infect a computer.

How to Avoid Being the Victim

- Never send sensi-

tive information in an email. Information sent through email can be intercepted by criminals. Make sure to consistently check financial account statements and credit reports for any signs of unauthorized activity.

- Secure your computer. Ensure your computer has the latest security updates installed. Check that anti-virus and anti-spyware software are running properly and receiving automatic updates from the vendor. If not already done, install and enable a firewall.

- Carefully select sites visited. Safely searching for tax forms, advice on deductibles, tax preparers and other similar topics requires great caution. Never visit a site by clicking on a link sent in an email, found on someone’s blog or in an advertisement. The websites connected to these links might look like legitimate sites, but can also be very well-crafted fakes.

- Be wise with Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi hotspots are intended to provide convenient access to the internet, however, this convenience can come

at a cost. Public Wi-Fi is not secure and is susceptible to eavesdropping by hackers, therefore, never use public Wi-Fi to file taxes.

- Look for clear signs. Common scams will tout tax rebates, offer great deals on tax preparation or offer a free tax calculator tool. If the information is unsolicited, it’s likely a scam.

- Be on the watch for fake IRS scams. The IRS will not contact you via email, text messaging or your social network. Nor does it advertise on websites. Additionally, if an email appears to be from an employer or bank claiming there is an issue that requires verification of personal information, this is most likely a scam as well. Don’t respond to these types of emails; always contact the entity directly.

- Always utilize strong passwords. Cybercriminals have developed programs that automate the ability to guess passwords.

For the best protection, make passwords difficult to guess.

Passwords should have a minimum of nine characters and include uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers and symbols.

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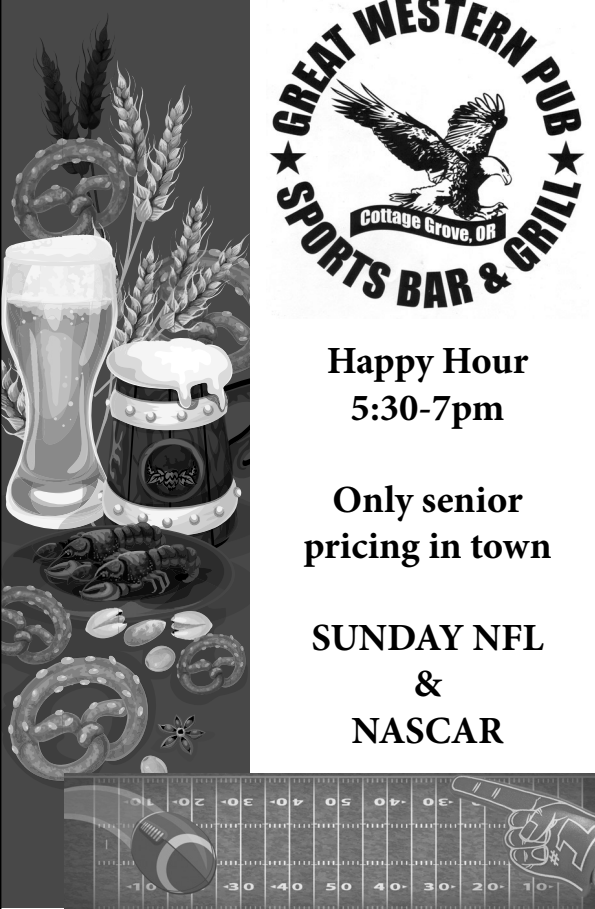
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