

Rural community worked to reduce the danger of wildfire

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concerned with wildfire protection and, over the years, has demonstrated their dedication and ingenuity through such efforts as their campfire program and cooperative outreach efforts with the Mist/Birkenfeld Rural Fire Protection District. Most recently they have been working with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) through a fuels reduction grant awarded to Columbia County.

ODF has been the administrator of a federal grant to help the residents of Columbia County prepare and protect themselves for wildfires. Kevin Nelson, a Forester with the Columbia City ODF office, has been assisting Columbia County residents in these efforts for the last year. Nelson performs individual Firewise assessments, signing up people for grant assistance with their protection projects, and coordinating community efforts. His serv-

ices are available for anyone interested in learning how to protect their homes. Assisting Fishhawk Lake with their desire to become a Firewise Community is just one of his latest endeavors.

Grant money was used to hire a chipping crew to assist with Fishhawk's first Firewise clean-up weekend, held last October. The residents pruned, cut, and otherwise cleaned up their properties of fuels and the chipping crew came through and disposed of the debris.

Fishhawk Lake now joins a short list of only eight other communities in Oregon to be officially Firewise, and is the first in Northwest Oregon.

If you are interested in having a free Firewise assessment done on your property, seeing if you qualify for grant assistance, or learning more about how you can protect your property call Nelson at 503-397-2636.



Mist/Birkenfeld RFPD Fire Chief Dave Crawford (left) and Fishhawk Lake Recreation Club representative Kathy Cardona accepted the community's Firewise award, presented by Kevin Nelson of the Oregon Department of Forestry. Photo courtesy of ODF.

Minimum wage increase is a help to low-income Oregonian workers

by Chris Thomas, Oregon News Service

The first paychecks of the New Year are a little bit bigger for some workers in Oregon. The new minimum wage has kicked in: \$8.50 an hour means those employees are earning ten cents more per hour than last year. It translates to a before-tax annual income of about \$17,000 a year for a full-time worker.

Recent college graduate Laura Baker, who makes just above minimum wage, says the extra \$20 or so a month really helps. "For a salaried person, that may sound a little bit trivial, but for people who are just struggling to make sure they can go buy groceries, twenty bucks is a lot. That can help you buy a bus pass. It can help you buy school supplies for your kids."

Baker said she works two lower-paid part-time jobs, and has been unable to find work in her chosen profession. The National Employment Law Project (NELP) reports over 87,000 Oregonians make minimum

wage, and more than 60 percent of them are women.

Oregon is one of ten states where the minimum wage increases when cost of living goes up. Opponents of that system say it increases costs to business with very little benefit to employees. But Ann Thompson, NELP policy analyst, says even a small increase for the lowest-paid workers produces a variety of benefits, from lowered absenteeism and improved morale, to boosting the economy and the paychecks of other workers, as well, "Generally when we see minimum wage increases, it brings up the floor. So it brings up the lowest wage, but it also gives a little bit of a bump to the workers who are making, you know, 50 cents or a dollar more."

Oregon has a lower per-capita personal income than the national average but, according to the State Employment Department, the number of minimum-wage workers is not a factor, and Oregon's minimum wage is the second-highest in the nation.

Protect your debit card from skimming

Better Business Bureau (BBB) warns that ATM skimming is a growing problem. Identity thieves tamper with ATMs to steal debit card numbers and PINs. It only takes a few seconds to install cameras

over the keypad and a device over the card reader. ATMs aren't the only hot spots, credit card readers at gas pumps and retailers can be tampered with as well.

According to Bankrate.com,

ATM skimmers are close to reaping \$1 billion annually from unsuspecting consumers. Javelin Strategy & Research estimates that one in five people have become victims.

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