

UCAN News Articles – March 2017



Thursday, March 9, 2017

Vol Ops: Helping at food pantries one of many volunteer opportunities

Hunger in Douglas County is a topic that's often in the news. The 15 food pantries throughout the county have taken up the challenge.

Perhaps the oldest of them is FISH. It was founded in 1971 by local churches to provide emergency food to low-income families in Roseburg. From its headquarters at 405 Jerry's Drive, it serves an average of 4,200 people and almost one-third of those are children. It is a volunteer run organization with only one part-time paid staff.

It is in need of volunteers not only to stock shelves in the pantry but also to facilitate transportation, short-term shelter and assistance with children's medication needs. Clients pick the food items they need and volunteers bag them. In Roseburg, it wants helping hands from 1 to 3 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday and from 8:30 to 11 a.m. on Thursday and Friday. On Tuesdays, it needs volunteers from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 131 4th St. in Drain. For more information, call Betty at 541-680-6089 or email her at bslashier@gmail.com.

Other pantries that desperately need helpers 18 years and older are:

Dillard-Winston Food Pantry at 131 4th St., Dillard wants help from 8 to noon on Monday and Wednesday. It's also open on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Call Rene at 541-430-7535.

The Riddle Food Bank in south county distributes food from 9 to noon on Thursday and from 10 a.m. to noon on the third, fourth and fifth Saturdays. It is located at the corner of 5th and E streets. Call 541-391-2796 or Lorie at 541-643-3831.

Sutherlin-Oakland Emergency Pantry at 183 E. 1st St., in Sutherlin needs helpers from 9 to 11 a.m. on Monday and Wednesday. Call 541-459-4082 for more information.

UCAN Food Bank is desperately looking for drivers and food sorters. Volunteers 18 and over are needed throughout the week to help in the warehouse, to repack food boxes and to pick up donations from area grocery stores. The warehouse distributes the food collected to pantries throughout the county. Call Volunteer Hotline 541-492-3526 to get details.

St. Joseph Community Kitchen, 800 W. Stanton St., Roseburg, serves hot meals at 5 p.m. Monday and Wednesday. Call Leo at 541-440-6972 if you'd like to lend a hand.

Friendly Kitchen, 771 W. Harvard Ave. in Roseburg, serves hot meals and also delivers them to the homebound. Mealtime is 11 a.m. to noon every day. Contact Annette at 541-673-5929 or friendlykitchen@charter.net

St. Francis Community Kitchen, 323 N. Comstock St. in Sutherlin, serves hot meals on Mondays and Wednesdays at 4:30 p.m. If you can help them call Gail at 541-459-1371 or Theresa at 541-459-3156.

If these opportunities don't tug at your heartstrings, below are some that might:

Brookdale Memory Care Center needs volunteers from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. on the third and fourth Wednesday to ride along with the residents who volunteer at Saving Grace and the Mercy Dental Program; and from 9:50 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. on the second Friday to escort the residents on the bus for a drive through Wildlife Safari. For more information, call Sandy at 541-464-5600.

Saving Grace Adoption Center is looking for volunteers as young as 10 to 15, accompanied by an adult, and those 16 and older to help with kennel care, feeding and walking the dogs, grooming the cats, grounds keeping and helping to trap feral cats. The center at 450 Old Del Rio Road is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday. Call Trina at 541-672-3907, ext. 111.

RSVP/AARP needs immediate help with the Tax Aide Program and Earned Income Tax Credit Outreach. Volunteer duties include receptionists, brochure distribution, onsite support at the tax aide locations and other responsibilities. Volunteers must be 55 or older. Call the Volunteer Hotline 541-492-3526.

Senior Companion Program is looking for volunteers 55 and older to visit homebound seniors and individuals with disabilities, take them to community outings, assist with their daily activities and provide respite for family caregivers. Qualified volunteers receive a tax-free stipend and mileage reimbursement for a minimum of 15 hours a week. Contact Colleen at 541-492-3520 or colleen.may@ucancap.org

For the following volunteer opportunities call Karen, UCAN/RSVP Volunteer Coordinator at 541-492-3917:

Vet Team Volunteer Program is looking for both male and female volunteers to help the UCAN Case Management team find housing for homeless veterans in the county and to be a support for the homeless veterans in the program. Duties may include helping clients fill out paper work; taking them to look at properties; helping them prepare for interviews and mentoring.

UCAN/RSVP needs 3 volunteers to help place new recruits in appropriate programs, to help create and design volunteer and promotional information, to work with social media, assist with data collection of volunteer hours, and assist in planning volunteer events. Volunteers may be 18 years and older.



Thursday, March 9, 2017

Local soup kitchen looking for helping hands (RSVP)

By Rebecca De Greyt for the Daily Courier

Sponsored by the United Community Action Network, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program matches the talents of people 55 and older with nonprofit agencies, and health care facilities throughout Josephine County.

- **BE A HELPING HAND.** St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen is in need of cooks and servers. If you have time from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. one day a week, your assistance would be much appreciated. There are many in the community who are in need, and the soup kitchen provides one hot meal a day for the clients. Please help in making it possible for this service to continue. All are invited to apply, serve, or donate. Please contact Rebecca de Greyt to learn about the application process, 541-956-4474.

- **WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A RED CROSS AMBASSADOR?** The Red Cross always needs great people like you to give of their time and service. Donor Ambassadors welcome blood donors, helping them through the registration process and serving them refreshments after the donation process. They are also an integral part of the team to help keep blood drives organized. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474.

- **ARE YOU A PEOPLE PERSON?** Asante Lifeline is pleased to provide members of Rogue Valley's senior community with America's most trusted medical alert service. For more than 40 years, Lifeline has enabled millions of people to live with greater independence, peace of mind and dignity in the place they feel most

comfortable their own homes. Be a volunteer with Asante Lifeline to make this possible for community members in Josephine County. To find out more information and how to start volunteering please contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474

• **SUPPORT INDEPENDENT LIVING.** Become a part of the Food & Friends Senior Meal Program, where they provide balanced nutritional meals and provide social contact. This helps in providing a safety net for those in the community and gives those an opportunity to interact with others. Dining Room help is needed and training is provided. Volunteers need to complete a criminal background check.

If you would like to find out more information, please come by the UCAN-RSVP Office at 125 N.E. Manzanita and pick up an RSVP application, or call Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474.



Tuesday, March 14, 2017

AARP Tax Aide struggles to find volunteers

The RSVP and AARP Tax Aide Program's temporary offices in Douglas County are busy this season as volunteers work to prepare state and federal tax returns free of charge for people with low to moderate incomes.

However, the income tax assistance service has been struggling to retain and recruit volunteers to keep it running each year, which means less people are able to have their tax returns processed for free.

As the average age of remaining volunteers increases, Karen McGuire, UCAN RSVP volunteer program manager, said she's not seeing empty slots filled by new volunteers behind them.

"We have wonderful volunteers who have been very dedicated for many years," McGuire said. "They're all retired volunteers and some of them are starting to want to move on to other things of life, so we're really hoping to increase our numbers."

Tax Aide filled up all its available appointments in February, but walk-ins are welcome if they don't mind waiting a few hours to receive the tax services.

The program is sponsored by the United Community Action Network's RSVP program and is administered through the AARP Foundation in cooperation with the IRS and the Oregon Department of Revenue. Anyone can receive the services, though priority goes to the elderly and disabled with low to moderate incomes.

According to Lynda Frommer, the AARP Douglas County district coordinator, the program served more than 2,200 clients in 2016, 60 percent of whom were 60 or older, and the average income for all returns was \$23,527.

“It’s really trying to meet the needs of a growing population in Douglas County of those that fit this category,” McGuire said.

Frommer, who has volunteered with AARP for 11 years, said the clients received over \$2 million in federal tax refunds while low-income individuals and families received \$552,895 in Earned Income Tax Credits. The estimated value of this service was \$300,000, but was done for free by volunteers contributing almost 6,500 hours of work.

Anyone age 55 and older are welcome to volunteer with RSVP, which is part of national community service organization Senior Corps and partners with a variety of local organizations, including Community Cancer Center, VA Medical Center, South Douglas Food Bank and the Friendly Kitchen to name a few. Younger people are still encouraged to reach out to volunteer, as they can help the program in other ways.

Volunteers with Tax Aide do not need to have prior experience in tax preparation, and the program trains them in IRS requirements.

“There’s a lot of support,” Frommer said. “We really work as a team. We try to help as many people as we can.”

She added that every return goes through a quality review process which significantly increases accuracy. Last year in Oregon, tax returns that were reviewed for quality had a 98 percent accuracy rate while those that weren’t reviewed had a 66 percent accuracy rate.

In addition to tax preparers, the program is looking for volunteers to post fliers and posters around the county at the start of the tax season next year, provide publicity and education, offer social media support, greet clients, serve as a client facilitator, schedule clients and provide logistical support.

Betty Epley has volunteered the past five years as a greeter for the Roseburg Tax Aide location.

“It’s rewarding,” Epley said. “I think people appreciate it.”

This year, volunteer tax preparers are using a new software program with a steep learning curve, which has led to delays.

While it normally took an hour to prepare one client's taxes, this year it has taken two hours, so less clients can be served.

"I commend them," McGuire said of the volunteers. "This is not an easy new software transition to make. Most of them want to serve and meet the needs of the clients, and it's a struggle this year."

Finding locations to use as temporary offices during tax season is another challenge for Tax Aide. This year, the main hub for the Roseburg area is at 1215 S.E. Court St., Roseburg, which offers limited space and will not be available next year, according to McGuire. Other current locations are C. Giles Hunt Library at 210 E Central, Sutherlin, Winston Community Center at 440 Grape Ave., Winston and Riddle Community Center at 123 Parkside St., Riddle.

McGuire said Tax Aide will not close, but it may need to downsize its services if it's left with too few volunteers and locations next year.

For more information, call the UCAN RSVP volunteer hotline at 541-492-3526.



Friday, March 17, 2017

Soup kitchen needs cooks, servers (RSVP)

By Rebecca De Greyt for the Daily Courier

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Sunday, March 19, 2017

MOBILE SOUP KITCHEN ALMOST READY TO ROLL: Volunteers still needed before new food truck will be ready for business



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

This is St. Vincent DePaul's new mobile soup kitchen, which will be parked at various locations around town during the week to serve food to the needy. The program was supposed to roll out on Monday, but has been held up due to a last-minute volunteer shortage.

By Troy Shinn of the Daily Courier

A new mobile soup kitchen will not roll out on Monday as originally planned, due to a volunteer shortage.

The food trailer will replace the St. Vincent de Paul Dining Hall in downtown Grants Pass, which is closing. The food trailer will be parked at different locations around town each weekday to serve food to those in need.

Closing the soup kitchen and replacing it with a food truck is the latest effort by city officials and charities to alleviate chronic complaints about street people flocking to St. Vincent's dining hall, which has been operating for 18 years on Seventh Street near M Street.

The thinking is that the truck will still be able to feed people, but without attracting large concentrations of vagrants that have often resulted in situations that require police assistance.

But first, St. Vincent's needs more volunteers.

"It's all done through volunteers," said Renee Thornton, council president for St. Vincent de Paul. "They come and go and get busy with other things in their lives ... That's caused a delay."

The group needs about four more regular volunteers for operations on Thursdays and Fridays. Thornton also said they need two more cooks, one for Wednesdays and one for Thursdays.

Ken Emilio, executive director of the Gospel Rescue Mission, said the project has been an effort between a few groups. Ending years of practice, the Gospel Rescue Mission stopped serving daily meals last summer, citing security concerns.

"We're helping out St. Vincent on that," Emilio said. "Our role has been as a partnership on their committee. "We're looking forward to the idea of getting all around the city."

Most of the locations are at churches. Also participating is the UCAN office in northeast Grants Pass.

Emilio said involvement of the city Department of Public Safety has been crucial, too.

"The police are very knowledgeable about what locations would be best and they'll know where the truck is on each day to respond in case there are any issues," Emilio said. "Right now people have to walk and it's not that easy. It causes problems downtown."

Public Safety Chief Bill Landis is also on the committee that launched this project, and said the mobile kitchen should alleviate some of the concerns about street people downtown.

"This won't cause some of the focused congregation issues we've encountered," he said.

The current locations have signed up for the program through May, and different locations will likely follow. New and current locations will be posted at St. Vincent's, **UCAN**, the Reaching Our Communities Food Pantry, the Salvation Army, and Christian Services.

Emilio said the rotating locations are going to be the biggest learning curve for those who benefit from the program.

"I know that as ... we learn more as a team, I wouldn't be surprised if it takes some time to figure out where it's going to go next," Emilio said. "We're going to have to figure that one out."

Landis also said that the biggest challenges in getting the truck operational have been logistical.

The current soup kitchen has been operating as usual throughout the transition.

"Trying to get things switched over from the central location to the mobile truck means you're essentially doing two things at once," Landis said of St. Vincent's volunteers.

The group also had to get a truck that would satisfy the program's needs and make sure everything was in good condition.

The committee does not have a firm date to get the food trailer program going, due to the labor shortage. However, once the truck gets enough volunteers, the project is expected to hit the road.

Reach reporter Troy Shinn at 541-474-3806 or tshinn@thedailycourier.com

Mobile soup kitchen schedule

Once the mobile kitchen program begins, it will operate at the following locations:

- **Monday:** Grace Bible Church, 1555 N.E. 10th St.
- **Tuesday:** First Christian, 305 S.W. H St.
- **Wednesday:** Faith Christian Church, 2033 Harbeck Rd.
- **Thursday:** River Valley Community Church, Redwood campus, 2193 Midway Ave.
- **Friday:** **UCAN, 125 N.E. Manzanita Ave.**



Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Tax filing deadline this year is April 18

Tax filing season began this year Jan. 23. If you're like many Americans, you have yet to file your income tax return, particularly if you owe money.

The income tax filing deadline this year is April 18, a Tuesday.

For those expecting refunds, the IRS held refunds until February 16 only for those claiming an Earned Income Tax Credit.

For other information and rules on this credit, visit irs.gov.

If you have filed your return, didn't claim an EITC and are curious about the status of your refund, visit irs.gov and click on Where's My Refund? This is faster than calling and being put on hold.

The IRS updates the status of refunds once daily, so there is no need to check the website more than once a day.

For taxpayers who learned via social media that ordering a tax transcript will let them know when to expect their refund, this is not true. Transcripts will not necessarily reflect the amount or timing of a refund.

Locally, the Tax Aide program sponsored by AARP and UCAN, is still offering return preparation assistance and is accepting appointments for April 13, 14, 17 and 18. To schedule an appointment in Grants Pass call 541-956-4450. In Cave Junction call 541-592-6139.

If you like to file your own taxes, the IRS offers free brand-name software to those with incomes of \$64,000 or less under the Free File program. Roughly 77 percent of the nation's taxpayers are eligible for IRS Free File.

All taxpayers, regardless of income, can use the Free File fillable forms through the IRS website, irs.gov.

For those of you who like to do your own taxes in writing, forms are available at the post office.



Friday, March 24, 2017

Clothing fair is looking for those willing to lend a hand (RSVP)

By Rebecca De Greyt for the Daily Courier

Sponsored by the United Community Action Network, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program matches the talents of people 55 and older with nonprofit agencies, and health care facilities throughout Josephine County.

● **CLOTHING FAIR VOLUNTEERS.** Evergreen's Bear Hotel is now accepting donations for the Women's Crisis Support Team Spring Clothing Fair. We need your help in advance. Presort volunteers needed now! Volunteers are also needed for setup on April 7, the day before the sale, and on the day of the sale, April 8. Please contact the RSVP receptionist at 541-956-4472 if you would like to sign up to volunteer for this special event.

● **GIVE A CHEERY HELLO.** Become a Grants Pass Chamber of Commerce volunteer and learn about your community and your city as you help assist visitors, chamber members, and lend a hand in community events. If you are looking to brighten your day, start with a cheery hello to visitors and citizens of the Josephine County area. There are a variety of roles available. Please contact the RSVP receptionist at 541-956-4472 if you would like to sign up to volunteer.

● **KNACK FOR KNITTING?** Every Thursday at 1:30 p.m. the UCAN Knitters come together and knit for an hour in the break room. They knit hats, scarfs, and blankets for the clients that come into UCAN. Many Josephine County families come through our doors and are in crisis, lacking proper winter clothes to survive the cold nights. Sometimes all it takes is a hat and a scarf to make their day and to see a smile on their face. Come join the UCAN knitting club and be a part of making warm hands and smiling faces. Contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474 if you have any questions.

● **BE AN AMBASSADOR.** Volunteers are the heart and soul of the UCAN Josephine County Warehouse and the Raptor Creek Farm. Your generous contributions of time and talent help get our job done efficiently and effectively. We are looking for three people to be cross-trained to serve at the warehouse and be a driver for the Fresh Food Alliance. If you have the time and would like to learn more, please contact Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4472.

Prospective volunteers should contact RSVP Director Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474 or rebecca.degreyt@ucan cap.org



Friday, March 31, 2017

Help out at the WCST clothing fair (RSVP)

By Rebecca De Greyt for the Daily Courier

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● **CLOTHING FAIR VOLUNTEERS.** Evergreen's Bear Hotel is now accepting donations for the Women's Crisis Support Team Spring Clothing Fair on April 8. We need your help in advance. Presort volunteers needed now! Volunteers are also needed for setup on Friday, the day before the sale, and on the day of the sale. Please contact the RSVP receptionist at 541-956-4472 if you would like to sign up to volunteer for this special event.

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Prospective volunteers should contact RSVP Director Rebecca de Greyt at 541-956-4474 or rebecca.degreyt@ucan cap.org



Thursday, March 30, 2017

Taxpayers reminded not to leave behind Earned Income Tax Credits

Oregonians leave millions of dollars behind each year when they could be using that money to support their families or the local economy.

“The Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) are available for low to moderate income tax payers, it’s a credit and you can go back up to three years and claim on previous tax returns, which can really add up for families trying to make ends meet,” said Kathleen Flanagan, program officer for community economic development for the Ford Family Foundation.

But many Oregonians who qualify for EITC have not been claiming the money.

There is about \$100 million to \$130 million left on the table each year in Oregon, and statistically people in Douglas County claim less often than those in other parts of the state, according to the EITC tracking website the Ford Family Foundation uses to gather information. In Douglas County, about 20 percent of eligible taxpayers are not claiming EITC.

The Ford Family Foundation, along with United Community Action Network and NeighborWorks Umpqua, are trying to gather information about why people aren’t claiming it and are trying to increase the uptake of EITC claims in Douglas County.

Flanagan said there’s a variety of reasons why people may not claim EITC. Some might not be aware of it. Others might not need to file for a tax return, but don’t realize they qualify for EITC.

If the money is left sitting, those dollars don’t come back to taxpayers, which means they’re not spending it in the local economy. It’s a federal antipoverty initiative, so the money is left at the federal level if unclaimed.

Dan Shepherd of Elkton said he sees the value in the Earned Income Tax Credits.

“It helps people by incentivizing them to still work and yet realizes that the average income is not enough to support living standards to meet all their needs,” he said.

A husband, father of two daughters and Umpqua Community College student, Shepherd works to take care of properties and miscellaneous needs for couples in Roseburg and Elkton.

Shepherd said he’s known about EITC for the past decade, and he encourages fellow taxpayers to use a licensed tax preparer and certified public accountant to do their taxes, as they can help people handle their tax situation and save money.

“I think a lot of times people are intimidated by going to a tax professional because they feel it’s going to be really expensive, but I’ve found the gains outweigh the costs of having a CPA,” Shepherd said.

Shepherd speculated that some people might not make their finances a priority or they assume it’s safer to not file a tax return, without realizing they’re giving up money.

He also said he advises people to use their EITC to advance themselves financially by paying off debts or purchasing assets instead of just buying something they want.

“I think it’s very significant to anyone trying to support a family,” Shepherd said. “For Douglas County residents, it’s going to be extremely significant. It does a lot of good.”

Flanagan said out of all 50 states and Washington D.C., Oregon has ranked third worst for the number of people that qualify for EITC but are not claiming it. Oregonian taxpayers received a total of \$617 million from EITC in 2014. That same year, over \$900 million was claimed in Washington state.

“We’re trying to see how we can help move Douglas County up the list, and Oregon long term,” Flanagan said.

In 2016, almost 275,000 Oregonians received an average refund of \$2,136 per person, according to the NeighborWorks Umpqua website.

“That’s a significant amount of money coming back to the county that those individuals turn around and spend, typically, so it can be a real economic boost for the individual families and to the county,” Flanagan said.

Those claiming EITC can use it to lower the amount they owe in taxes or to receive a refund.

“If we can increase, even incrementally the number of families, that’s bringing dollars into their pockets that can turn around and be spent here locally, it can help folks make ends meet,” Flanagan said.

Karen McGuire, RSVP volunteer program manager for UCAN, said the EITC program is a step to counter poverty in the U.S.

“Even if you didn’t have to file taxes, you could still apply and get this Earned Income Tax Credit through the government program meant to put money back in the hands of those who are in the lower and medium income levels,” McGuire said. “It’s a lot of money left on the table that could be helping people to support their homes.”

To qualify, a taxpayer must have earned income as an employee or self-employed business owner and must have a social security number. He or she must not have foreign earned income or income derived from investments greater than \$3,400.

The taxpayer cannot use the married filing separately status but must be a U.S. citizen, a resident alien, a nonresident alien married to a U.S. citizen or a resident alien and filing a joint return.

Eligibility depends on the taxpayers’ adjusted gross and earned incomes and how many dependents they have. Those with no dependents can make up to \$14,880, those with one dependent can earn up to \$39,296, with two dependents they can earn up to \$44,648, and those with three or more can make \$47,955.

For more information, visit douglaseitc.org, cashoregon.org, or www.irs.gov.