

THE SKANNER

CHALLENGING PEOPLE TO SHAPE A BETTER FUTURE NOW



POETS OF POLITICS



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Spoken Word artist Alvin Lloyd Alexander Horn and a half dozen other poets performed Nov. 20 at the Northwest African American Museum in honor of President-elect Barack Obama's victory. Featured spoken word artists included Miz Flores, 6 Deep the Messenger, Ocho Gritos, Blaque Butterfly, Carmen Emerson, Frenchy Conde Lamont and Raquib Muied.

Utility Discount Available

Seattle steps up help for low-income assistance programs

By William Crane
Special To *The Skanner*

With winter approaching and a worsening economy, the City of Seattle wants to improve awareness about a program that reduces utility bills for senior citizens, the disabled and low-income families.

"Our goal is that everyone that is eligible in our service area knows about the discount

One of the main reasons for the decline in people using the program is that they are moving

program and has the opportunity to apply for it," said David Broom, supervisor of the utility assistance programs in the Mayor's Office for Senior Citizens.

The city's Utility Discount Program is designed to help families by having them save as much as 50 percent on their utility bills. The discount is applied to one's electricity, water, sewer and garbage bills. The city's idea behind the program is that with fuel, food and housing costs spiking, people on fixed incomes need help covering their bills.

"People who qualify can save between \$800 and \$900 per year on their costs," said Broom.

Currently, the exact discount a person or family receives is based on the size of their family and whether they are quality because they are a lower-income citizen, a senior citizen or disabled adult.

For low-income families, a household of four must make under \$3,533 to qualify, while a single-person household can make no more than \$1,733.

"The income limit goes up with the size of the household," said Broom.

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See ASSISTANCE on page 3

Payday Loans: Lost Resource or Ripoff?

Report compares Washington, Oregon laws, effects on poverty

By Brian Stimson
Of *The Skanner*

Two years ago, you couldn't drive more than a mile in some parts of Portland without seeing half a dozen store fronts advertising easy, quick cash. All you had to do was pay 521 percent annual interest (APR) and the cash was yours.

You had two weeks to pay it back, lest you be charged even more. Most couldn't.

In April 2006, Gov. Ted Kulongoski signed into law new regulations that limited loans to no more than a 150 percent APR and increased the amount of time you had to

pay back the loan from two weeks to 31 days.

When the law took effect in July 2007, it had an almost immediate effect on the number of payday loan companies operating in the state. Before, there were 360 licensed payday lenders in Oregon — that number was down to 82 in September, 2008.

So where have their former clients turned for ready cash? Many have found no alternative, according to a new study by Dartmouth College's Jonathan Zinman.

The study compared people in Oregon and Washington, where there was no change in regulations for payday loans.

According to the Zinman's study, 70 percent of respondents didn't know where to go or went nowhere for loans; 8 percent used a bank or credit union; and 15 percent were forced to use pawn shops, credit cards or car title loans in the absence of payday loans. Many of the 70 percent, Zinman says, ended up paying more in overdraft fees and late fees. He estimates that in some cases, people ended up paying more than they would have, had they had access to payday loans, although he says that situation could change, given time.

been through combat.

The java spot is located near Fort Lewis, at 15109 Union Ave. Southwest, in Lakewood.

Started by Seth Manzel of the G.I. Voice, and Matteo Rebecchi of Seattle's Iraq Veterans Against the War chapter, backers include Tully's chairman Tom O'Keefe — who donated \$15,000 worth of coffee sup-

plies for the startup — and Baltimore hip hop artist S.O.N. of Nun, who brought his "Art of Struggle Tour" to Seattle for two fundraisers earlier this month.

"If you look at the role that active duty and veteran soldiers had in ending the Vietnam war, I don't think that could have

See GI COFFEE on page 3

New GI Coffeehouse Opens in Tacoma

New café is a project of veterans who oppose the War in Iraq

By Lisa Loving
Of *The Skanner*

Taking a page from the anti-war movement among soldiers and veterans in the Vietnam era, the Coffee Strong Coffee House has opened its doors to enlisted men and women seeking counseling, resources — or just someone to talk to who's

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Assistance

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Families with seniors or disabled adults have higher income limit guidelines than those without. For example, a family of 4 with seniors or disabled adults must make no more than \$4,248.

The difference in income requirements is because of the way the city determines them. Currently, low-income families are required to make below 200 percent of the federal poverty level while senior citizens and the disabled must make under 70 percent of the state median income.

"The mayor has requested parity [income limits]," said Broom. "It should take place in January 2009 if approved by the City Council."

By having income requirements set to the 70 percent of the state median income, regardless of age or disability, the city believes the Utility Discount Program would be available to a larger number of customers.

Another major eligibility requirement is that the person or family cannot already be receiving subsidized or public housing.

"It's really an unfortunate situation," said Broom. "It has to do with the fact that people in Section 8 or public housing receive a credit already to pay for their utilities with."

The Utility Discount Program was created in 1970s to initially provide assistance to senior citizens and the disabled. However, a few years after its inception, the city council expanded the program to include lower income families as well.

In 2007, the program served over 15,000 Seattle utility customers. Despite reaching a number of its customers, the city hopes to expand knowledge of the program and to have 25 percent of those customers eligible for the discount to receive it.

"We've actually seen the number of people using the program falling," said Broom. "A lot of people are not aware of the discount program."

Broom said that the city is still determining exactly why the number of people using the discount program is falling. One of the main reasons for the decline in people using the program is that they are moving to out-

lying areas.

"With the increasing cost of living, its forcing lower income families to moving outside of service area," said Broom. "They tend to move to other areas such as Tukwila."

The city of Seattle has also created the PeoplePoint program as part of an outreach effort to the community and to those in need.

Currently, it has city staff working at Neighborhood Service Centers in Ballard, Delridge, the Central District and Lake City. The program provides people with information about the utility discount rate, basic health insurance, food and childcare assistance.

"One member of my staff recently helped a Seattle City Light and Public Utilities customer complete applications for the discount program and the Basic Food Program, and then she scheduled a follow-up meeting to help the client apply for a reduction in property taxes," said Broom.

Broom said that programs similar to the Utility Discount Program are available for residents in Snohomish County, Pierce County and other utilities such as Puget Sound Energy. There are also emergency services to prevent those from going without utilities in times of dire need.

Odune Fest



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Afua N'Diaye, the producer of the annual Odune Festival, gets a dance lesson from Okaidja Afroso of Ghana during a dance workshop Saturday at the Rainier Valley Cultural Center. The four-day festival included an African Marketplace, fashion show, dance and drumming workshops and four performances of *HOMELAND*, a dance musical by Kibibi Monie'.

For more information on the Utility Discount program, its eligibility requirements and how to apply visit <http://www.seattle.gov/humanservices/seniorsdisabled/mosc/utlififtypercent.htm> or call 206-684-0268.

SERVICE CENTERS

Central Neighborhood Service Center
2301 S Jackson, 98144
Mondays 2-5 p.m.

Ballard Neighborhood Service Center
5604 22nd Ave NW, 98107
Fridays 1-4 p.m.

Lake City Neighborhood Service Center
12525 28th Ave NE, 2nd Floor, 98125
Tuesdays 2-5 p.m.

Delridge Neighborhood Service Center
5405 Delridge Way SW, 98106
Fridays 1-4 p.m.

GI Coffee

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S.O.N. of Nun performed two benefits for the Coffee Strong Coffeehouse during his "Art of Struggle" national tour.

happened as quickly or even at all without GI newspapers and GI coffeehouses, which were ways to interact directly with soldiers who otherwise would not have a lot of contact with the outside world," a coffeehouse organizer known simply as "Jason" told *The Skanner*.

"I think that this coffeehouse in particular is going to offer a lot of things to soldiers that they can't get elsewhere."

Contrary to popular belief, the movement of the 1960s and 70s against the Vietnam War was largely led by soldiers and veterans. One key component of empowerment and activism among enlisted men and women were "coffeehouse and counseling" cafes set up near military bases.

As depicted in the award-winning 2005

film documentary "Sir! No Sir! The Suppressed Story of the GI Movement to End the War in Vietnam," the facilities offered a "demilitarized" environment where soldiers could talk openly about the issues and problems they saw in the military and the war.

The first GI coffeehouse, called the "UFO," was opened outside Ft. Jackson, S.C. in 1967, drawing hundreds of soldiers within its first months in operation.

An estimated 20 similar cafes eventually opened their doors within a few years.

Jason, who organized the S.O.N. of Nun fundraiser and other events around Coffee Strong Coffeehouse, said the café will provide the kinds of services the military itself has struggled to provide to all who need them - as well as room for soldiers and veterans to agitate against the military itself.

"Not only contacts with the antiwar movement and ways they can actually plug in to get involved, but also they can learn all kinds of things like where to get Post Traumatic Stress Disorder treatments, or if they've been deployed illegally, or if they shouldn't be deployed and they are, all kinds of things that they would need that are not going to be provided on base," Jason said.

"In Tacoma right across the highway from Fort Lewis, Fort Lewis being one of the most deployed bases in the country, I think there's a glaring need for something like that."

The coffeehouse had its official opening during the week of the Veterans Day holiday, featuring music by S.O.N. of Nun, whose current national tour agitates against the two current wars U.S. forces are waging in the Middle East.

"I think his politics and the people who want to support the GI Coffeehouse, I think there's a certain dovetailing there, so I thought it would be a really good thing to out on to let people know the coffeehouse is finally up its running, and it needs the community's support," Jason said.

The coffeehouse opening comes at a time when the anti-war movement in the Pacific Northwest is shifting from citizens in the street to returned Iraq and Afghanistan veterans organizing around their own stories of the conflicts, Jason said.

He pointed to the Winter Soldier hearings held in Portland last October, which drew more than 800 people from across the Pacific Northwest to listen to eyewitness testimony on war crimes by Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans - some of whom spoke about what they believe may have been crimes against humanity that they

themselves personally participated in.

The event was part of a national tour of similar hearings held by Iraq Veterans Against the War to commemorate the 5-year anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The original "Winter Soldier" tribunal was held in Detroit in 1971 by the group

Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The term "Winter Soldier" was taken from the opening lines of a pamphlet written by Thomas Paine in 1776: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

A transcript of the Winter Soldiers' eyewitness testimony was read into the Congressional Record in 1972. Their cause was picked up by Oregon Sen. Mark Hatfield, who led an effort to convince other lawmakers to stop the war in Vietnam.

The Coffee Strong Coffeehouse hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information call 253-581-1562, or go to www.givoice.org.

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