

Most Deschutes County Jobs Don't Pay a Living Wage

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Only 17 percent of all jobs in Oregon pay a wage that allows a family of three to pay for basics like health care, child care, food and housing, according to the annual report 2006 Northwest Job Gap Study: Living Wages in the Current Economy issued by the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (NWFCO).

Only 19 percent of Oregon jobs provide a living wage for a family of four, with two working adults. Only 31 percent of single adults with one child earn a living wage.

A Deschutes County family of three--one working adult with two children--must earn \$23.14 an hour to meet basic needs, says the new report. A single worker requires at least \$11.30 an hour to make a living in Deschutes County.

Latino, Native-American and African American workers in Central Oregon all earn considerably less than white workers, according to the report, and are much more likely to have no health insurance.

The Living Wage study determines the dollar amount a person must earn to be financially stable and self-sufficient, using data from the U.S. Department of Labor and other federal and state agencies. A living wage, according to the NWFCO, is a wage that "allows families to meet basic needs without public assistance and provides them some ability to deal with emergencies and plan ahead."

The Living Wage Report offers strategies that business, labor, and government can pursue to promote and create living wage jobs in their communities, including:

Â§ Establish job quality standards for employers and industries that receive public economic

development and businesses assistance resources.

Â§ Use living wage data to set wage policies.

Â§ Pursue strategies aimed at creating high wage, high skill jobs.

Â§ Invest in education and training programs that create opportunity for workers to move into living wage jobs.

Â§ Use living wage figures to determine eligibility for public assistance.

Â§ Ensure workers a strong voice in decisions affecting them.

"The cost of living continues to rise in Central Oregon, and especially in Bend," says Michael Funke, organizer for Central Oregon Jobs with Justice. "Local employers need to pay a living wage to hire and retain a workforce. Otherwise, qualified workers will be forced to move elsewhere, the gap between the haves and the have-not's will continue to grow, and our entire economy will suffer."

"The number of working people unable to make ends meet is a public problem," Funke added. "Business and government must work together to ensure that Central Oregon workers are able to find jobs that pay living wages and receive the support they need to live healthy, stable lives."

Central Oregon Jobs with Justice is a local coalition that campaigns for workers rights and economic justice. For more information, leave a message at 541-617-3879.

The Northwest Federation of Community Organizations is a regional federation of four statewide, community-based social and economic justice organizations located in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. For more information about their work, go to www.nwfc.org.

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