



Getting help after identity theft

BY RUSS VAN ARSDALE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NORTHEAST CONTACT

Having your identity stolen means starting a recovery process that can take months, even years.

The Federal Trade Commission, or FTC, last week announced an upgrade of its efforts to help the millions of consumers who are victimized every year.

Edith Ramirez, chairwoman of the FTC, told participants on a conference call that complaints about identity theft to her agency rose by nearly 50 percent last year. Ramirez said, while that's shocking enough, the true scope of the crime is not known because it is "vastly underreported."

What is known is that thieves are illegally opening new accounts, getting access to existing accounts fraudulently and filing phony tax returns, all while using other people's names and personal information.

The FTC says victims can ease the task of getting their financial lives back in order by visiting the agency's secure recovery website at identitytheft.gov.

Visitors can browse the range of recovery tips or jump right in by entering as much relevant data as possible that led to their identities being stolen. The FTC thinks the upgraded site will give consumers a one-stop means of filing a complaint about identity theft and beginning the process of recovery.

Victims are asked to first enter basic information about the type of identity theft to which they were subjected. Then the site walks the victims through a checklist geared toward that type of crime.

The site will generate affidavits and automatically fill a lot of information in letters and forms to be sent to police, businesses, credit bureaus, debt collectors and the IRS. If a recovery effort hits a snag, the site will suggest other ways to proceed.

To minimize further risks, the site will not ask victims for sensitive information, including dates of birth and Social Security numbers. There will be follow-up emails from the site, and consumers can go back to their plans later — through two-factor authentication — as their recovery continues.

The U.S. Justice Department estimates that 17.6 million Americans were victims of identity theft. See Forum, Page C2



Byron Delano of Lincoln works assembling airplane floats at PK Floats of Lincoln. The company has expanded rapidly since its rebirth in September.

NICK SAMBIDES JR. | BDN

Taking flight

Airplane float manufacturer gets back in the air with new products

BY NICK SAMBIDES JR.
BDN STAFF

LINCOLN — Levi Guimond didn't think he'd ever again work at PK Floats when it closed three years ago.

The owner of the business, Alton Bouchard, had just died, and the people who made the place go were coping with the loss and the need to get new jobs, Guimond recalled.

"It's a very unique company," Guimond, a 28-year-old manufacturing engineer from Lee, said. "I figured the chances of somebody coming in and running it here were nil. There aren't that many places building this kind of product. The flying community that uses these kinds of floats is very small."

Yet as of last week, the company had regained its Federal Aviation Administration certification to build airplane floats, had already built or sold half the 20 sets of floats planned for 2016 and was in the process of expanding its product line to include airplane snow-skis and two new kinds of airplane floats, according to Patrick McGowan, a former Maine conservation commissioner, legislator and Democratic candidate for governor who is president of the company.

The certification came on Jan. 14 — relatively quick, considering the company started to re-group in September and such documentation can take years to

qualify for, McGowan said.

"I don't know how we could have gotten off to a better start than we have," McGowan said.

PK Floats' successful rebirth and expansion off Flyaway Drive fit well with town plans to turn land adjacent to Flyaway and the town airport near West Broadway into an industrial park, according to Ruth Birtz, the town's economic development coordinator.

Watch the video
bangordailynews.com

Emera Maine workers finished installing three-phase power at the airport for PK's use in manufacturing airplane skis about two weeks ago, Birtz said. The Town Council voted 7-0 in September to allocate as much as \$65,000 to pay for the installation, which will also service other businesses. The final bill for the work hasn't come in yet.

The installation, town officials have said, is part of plans to add public water and wastewater service to River Road, both key steps to developing the industrial park, airport and River Road, a largely undeveloped stretch of land between West Broadway and Chester and Interstate 95's Exit 227.

The company plans to add two workers to its 11-member staff to manufacture airplane skis with a subsidiary, Kehler Ski of British Columbia, starting in



Levi Guimond looks over airplane floats in the company's plant in Lincoln.

March or April. That's up from seven workers in September. If all goes well, PK could have 15 to 20 workers in the next two or three years because of new products and increased sales, according to Keith Strange, PK's production manager.

"We'd like to see employment double, and we'd like to see [the construction of] a potential new facility, but that's all based on projections of new products and float sales," McGowan said. "We're very hopeful. The response has been outstanding."

Within the next few months, the company will start selling airplanes as well as floats. They will be operating on Bouchard's observation the company's floats — which cost \$24,950 to \$76,500 per pair, according to pkfloats.com — sell better when they are attached to airplanes, McGowan said.

But McGowan said he is cautious.

There's no way, he said, to know how much the production of new floats is result of the company's three-year shutdown or represents sustained growth. The sales market can be erratic, and airplane floats and skis are part of a relatively small niche in the aviation marketplace, McGowan said.

The company has about 1,400 sets of floats in use worldwide, which makes it among the world's most prolific manufacturers of airplane floats, he said.

"We're going slowly. We can't go rushing into the market and not meet customers' expectations," McGowan said, "but we know that we've got a good customer base out there. We're going to go slowly and see how things go. But, yeah, I'm excited."

Consumer spending flattens in December

REUTERS

WASHINGTON — Consumer spending was unchanged in December as households cut back on purchases of automobiles and unseasonably mild weather weighed on demand for utilities, but a jump in savings to a three-year high suggested there is enough muscle to boost consumption in the months ahead.

The U.S. Department of Commerce said Monday the unchanged reading in consumer spending followed an upwardly revised 0.5 percent increase in November. When adjusted for inflation, consumer spending edged up 0.1 percent after a 0.4 percent gain in November.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, edging up 0.1



Villagomez pays for her purchases during Black Friday shopping at a Target store in Chicago in November. The U.S. Department of Commerce announced Monday that consumer spending slowed in December as households purchased fewer automobiles and mild weather reduced demand for utilities.

JIM YOUNG | REUTERS FILE

percent in December after a previously reported 0.3 percent gain in November.

Consumer spending increased 3.4 percent in 2015 after advancing 4.2 percent in 2014.

That data was included in last Friday's fourth-quarter gross domestic product report, which showed consumer spending slowed to a 2.2 percent annual rate from the third quar-

ter's brisk 3 percent pace.

Moderate consumer spending, weak export growth and ongoing efforts by businesses to reduce unsold merchandise piled up in warehouses helped restrict economic growth to a 0.7 percent pace in the fourth quarter. More cutbacks in investment by energy firms struggling with lower oil prices also hurt GDP growth.

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Gas prices dip to \$1.88 average in Maine

BY DARREN FISHELL
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Regular gasoline sold for an average of \$1.88 per gallon in Maine this week, down another three cents from one week ago.

The dip brings the average price to the lowest point in more than seven years and about 20 cents lower than one year ago, according to the price tracking site GasBuddy.com.

Patrick DeHaan, a senior analyst at GasBuddy, said gasoline prices may continue to drift lower for a few weeks, but rebounding crude oil prices signal pump prices will start to climb in the coming weeks.

The price for crude oil is the primary factor affecting what consumers pay at the pump for gasoline, and benchmark crude prices have rebounded to more than \$30 per barrel.

"For now, due to a lag time from rising oil prices, gasoline prices in many areas may continue to drift lower, but don't be caught by surprise if in a few weeks they revert and move higher," DeHaan said in a news release. "Refiners have already begun some winter maintenance, and while supply of winter gasoline is abnormally high, once that inventory is liquidated, I fully expect gasoline prices to march higher."

The price dip in Maine follows a national decrease of more than two cents, down to an average of \$1.80 per gallon.

Maine's statewide average was higher than New Hampshire's (\$1.80 per gallon) and lower than Vermont's (\$1.97 per gallon).

On Monday, \$1.70 per gallon was the lowest price recorded in the state, and \$2.29 was the highest reported.