

BUSINESS

Ready, set, file

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Minnesota Department of Revenue announced it will open state income tax filing season Jan. 20.

For the benefit and convenience of Minnesota taxpayers, Minnesota will open on the same day as the Internal Revenue Service.

With recent Congressional action extending several tax benefits for Minnesota teachers, college students, homeowners, and small businesses, the department is asking state lawmakers to take swift action to pass legislation conforming Minnesota's tax codes to the updated federal provisions by Jan. 20.

"Taking action by Jan. 20 will ensure that Minnesota's families and businesses can take advantage of these benefits and produce a smooth opening to filing season for everyone," Revenue Commissioner Myron Frans said in a news release. "If we do not conform quickly, Minnesotans may need to pay millions more in taxes and file additional forms with this year's taxes."

Nomination process opens up

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

If there's a certain Borderland business you're a fan of and want to show some appreciation for, now's your chance.

The nomination process for the annual Joel Labovitz Entrepreneurial Success Awards has opened, and the deadline for nominations is Feb. 28.

The awards, commonly referred to as the "Labos," are organized by the University of Minnesota-Duluth Center for Economic Development, and are in their 23rd year of celebrating entrepreneurial excellence in northeast Minnesota.

Two local businesses, Einarson's Flying Service and the Coffee Landing Cafe, were nominated for the award in 2014.

A business may be nominated by a customer, client, employee, vendor or any individual who wants to recognize a business owner. Nominations

are sought from Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake and St. Louis counties, as well as Douglas County in Wisconsin.

"If you've thought about it for a while but hesitated, we encourage people to make this the year they nominate a deserving business," Elaine Hansen, UMD CED Director said in a news release. "This is an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments and recognize those individuals who have taken risks that have created an economic impact and employment opportunities in our region."

Nominations can be completed online at www.umdced.com. Award recipients will be announced April 22 at the Joel Labovitz Entrepreneurial Success Awards Luncheon at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center, as part of regional celebration of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Small Business Week.

Unemployment claims hit new low

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

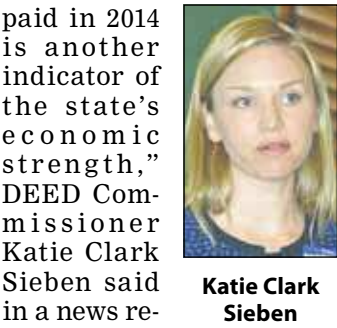
The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development will provide summaries of unemployment benefits paid in 2014 to 178,649 Minnesotans, the lowest level of claims since before the Great Recession.

The state's summary forms are sent to every applicant who received unemployment benefits. In 2009, DEED sent 351,458 summaries. In 2010, DEED sent 348,780 summaries to Minnesotans who received unemployment benefits.

The number of applicants who received benefits in 2014 will take the state down to pre-recessionary levels. In 2007, DEED sent 181,927 forms outlining benefits paid.

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Minnesota fell to 3.7 percent in November — well below the U.S. unemployment rate of 5.8 percent. The state's unemployment rate is at its lowest level since May 2001.

"The state's low level of unemployment benefits



Katie Clark Sieben

paid in 2014 is another indicator of the state's economic strength," DEED Commissioner Katie Clark Sieben said in a news release. "With the addition of new jobs and high job vacancies, the state is focused on continuing to connect all Minnesotans with the right training for the available jobs."

The U.S. Department of Labor recently presented DEED with its 2014 Performance Excellence Award for Unemployment Insurance Appeals during a recent National Association of State Workforce Agencies annual UI directors' conference.

DEED received the award for creating a new, innovative training program for its unemployment law judges and for developing an online self-service scheduling system for appealing decisions on unemployment insurance benefits.

As a result of these changes,

Minnesota has achieved a 100 percent score for six consecutive quarters based on the U.S. Department of Labor's quality review. The changes also enabled Minnesota to issue timely unemployment appeals decisions over the last several years, thus reducing improper benefit overpayments and ensuring that citizens who were entitled to benefits did not have lengthy wait times to receive those payments.

Minnesota currently exceeds federal standards for timeliness, issuing 88 percent of all appeal decisions within 30 days of appeal and 96 percent of decisions within 45 days of appeal. The average age of a pending case is now 13.5 days.

DEED's UI Program provides temporary partial wage replacement for workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. Under state law, UI clients can appeal if they are not satisfied with a benefits determination by the UI Program. The appeal includes the right to a fair and impartial hearing before an unemployment law judge.

Local business consultants available

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The local Voyage Forward initiative has provided funding to support business resource specialists, in order to assist businesses in Koochiching County.

The University of Minnesota-Duluth Center for Economic Development has compiled a group of specialists to provide services through the local Small Business Development Center.

The project is funded jointly through the U.S. Department of Commerce's

Economic Development Administration, and through local funds from Koochiching County and the city of International Falls. Funding has been made available to assist the region in recovering from the workforce reduction at the local paper mill in October 2013.

Areas of consulting expertise include business feasibility analysis and studies, strategic planning, legal and accounting consultation, website development, marketing, consulting, and product export assistance. Other special-

ized services may be provided based on specific business requirements, consultant expertise, and available funding.

Services are generally provided at the International Falls SBDC office, the client's business site, or via electronic methods. Projects for this grant-funded initiative must be located in Koochiching County.

For additional information, contact Jenny Herman at 218-283-8585, via email at jenny@businessupnorth.com or visit www.voyageforward.org.

State chamber seeks new president

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce has launched its search for a new president, after the death of longtime president David Olson in July.

In August, the chamber's board of directors named Bill Blazar the interim presi-

dent. The 48-member board of directors will now steer the process of finding a new president.

The president is responsible for leading and executing the strategic plan adopted by the board of directors.

The Minnesota Chamber is the state's largest and

premier business advocacy organization representing 2,300 businesses of all sizes and types across the state. As the statewide voice of business, the organization helps businesses advocate, connect and grow. It excels at offering private-sector solutions to public-sector problems.



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January 15 -17

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THURSDAY:
6pm: Wing Eating Contest at the VIKING BAR
\$5 entry fee
Come test your wing eating skills!
Each person will get 12 wings. First to finish their wings WINS!
1st Place: \$75 2nd Place: \$50 3rd Place: \$25

7pm: Redneck Trivia at the VIKING BAR
There are 5 rounds of Trivia, with 10 questions in each round. Each round a winner will be determined by the most questions answered correctly out of 10. The winner receives a FREE DRINK for each round won.

FRIDAY:
7pm: BARGO AT THE UNION HALL
BARGO just like bingo, but bar style. Every 10 minutes there is a chance for you to win a FREE DRINK. BARGO cards are given out until 8pm only. Buy a drink, and get a card for FREE! At 9pm the BLACKOUT BARGO game begins. Cover your card in a certain amount of numbers and win the jackpot of CASH!

10pm: CAN CRUSHING CONTEST at the UNION HALL
Contestants will be given a crusher and cans. Who ever crushes the most cans in 1 minute win \$50!

SATURDAY:
1pm: Toilet Seat Toss outside the VIKING BAR
Great event for all ages! Come test your toilet seat tossing skills. Who ever can toss the seat the furthest wins! Winner in the kids division gets a certificate to the Dairy Queen along with a trophy. The winner in the Adult division gets a certificate for the Viking Bar along with a trophy.

2:30pm: Kid Smoosh Races outside the VIKING BAR
Smoosh boards are provided. 2 kids per set of boards. All kids get a prize for participating. Trophies will be given for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place teams.

3pm: Adult Smoosh Races outside the VIKING BAR
4 adults per set of boards. Grab some 2x4s and old shoes. Screw your old shoes to the boards and come race for 1st Place!
Trophies will be given for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place teams
1st Place: \$100 2nd Place: \$80 3rd Place: \$60

SIGN YOUR TEAM UP at the VIKING BAR 218-283-4000

9pm: LIVE BAND AT THE UNION HALL
The 'Shackshakers' at the Union Hall. Come out for some fun after all the IceBox Days Events!
Warm up & Dance the night away!
412 3rd Street - Int'l Falls