

Electronic payment deadline nears

The U.S. Department of the Treasury reported that five million checks continue to be mailed to federal beneficiaries each month. With just two months remaining until the March 1, 2013, electronic payment law goes into effect, the Treasury Department is urging Social Security and other federal benefit recipients to not delay and switch now to either direct deposit or the Direct Express® Debit MasterCard® card.

“Choosing direct deposit or the Direct Express® card makes it easier, safer and more convenient for beneficiaries to receive their payments. Switching to an electronic payment is not optional – it’s the law,” said David Lebryk, commissioner of the Treasury Department’s Financial Management Service. “If you or a loved one still receive paper checks for your benefit payments, now is the time to switch. It’s free and easy – just call 1-800-333-1795 or www.GoDirect.org.”

Currently, approximately 93 percent of Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments are being made electronically. Converting the remaining paper check recipients to electronic payments will save American taxpayers \$1 billion over the next 10 years.

Spreading the word about electronic payments The Treasury Department published a final rule in December 2010 to gradually phase out paper checks for federal benefit payments. Since May 1, 2011, all people newly applying for federal benefits, including Social Security, SSI, Veterans Affairs, Railroad Retirement Board, Office of Personnel Management benefits and other non-tax payments, have had to choose direct deposit or the Direct Express® card at the time they sign up for their benefits. March 1, 2013, is the final deadline by which all remaining federal benefit check recipients must receive their money electronically.

The Treasury Department’s Go Direct® public education campaign is working with more than 1,800 partner organizations throughout the country to spread the message about the elec-

tronic payment rule and educate federal benefit recipients about their options. The campaign has developed and shared a variety of public service announcements, educational videos, check inserts and other materials to explain how electronic payments work and how to make the switch from paper checks. The videos and materials are available on the Go Direct campaign website at www.GoDirect.org.

“The Treasury Department has taken great strides to support and guide check recipients through the change to electronic payments, and we’re increasing our efforts significantly in the final two months before the deadline,” Lebryk said. “We have a team of friendly, helpful agents standing by at our call center, and many financial institutions, caregivers, senior services providers and advocates for people who are homeless or have disabilities have the necessary information and resources to help federal benefit recipients make the switch.”

Switch to electronic payments now before time runs out

Check recipients can sign up for direct deposit or the Direct Express® card by calling toll-free 1-800-333-1795, visiting www.GoDirect.org, or talking to their local federal paying agency office. The process is fast, easy and free.

By taking a few minutes to gather the necessary information ahead of time, most federal benefit recipients can sign up for electronic payments with one phone call.

Individuals will need their Social Security number or claim number, their 12-digit federal benefit check number and the amount of their most recent federal benefit check. If choosing direct deposit, recipients also will need their financial institution’s routing transit number, (often found on a personal check) account number and account type (checking or saving).

There are no sign-up fees or monthly fees to receive benefits electronically.

Little kids dance camp



Several young students from Eisenhower Elementary School attended the Little Kids Dance Camp on Saturday. Under the direction of Melodie Bock, the high school dance coach, they were taught routines by the Norton Community High School Dance Team members. The songs they danced to, “We are Family” and “Beauty and the Beast.” They then held a short program to show family and friends what they had learned. The kids will perform during halftime of the boys varsity game at Stull gym on Tuesday, Feb. 5.

—Telegram photo by Dana Paxton

Biking, pedestrian needs examined

The Kansas Department of Transportation is seeking public input to help identify statewide bicycling and pedestrian needs.

Becky Pepper, KDOT bicycle pedestrian coordinator, said an online survey has been posted on KDOT’s website, www.ksdot.org, to collect the opinions and comments of Kansans. The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete.

“The survey will help us better understand how to use limited resources for bicycling and pedestrian facilities in Kansas,” Pepper said. “The survey is part of the Kansas Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan update to enhance transportation and related goals of safety, public health, recreation, tourism and community development.”

Survey respondents will be asked how they use and value bicycling and walking facilities and policies and whether changes are needed.

“We are interested in knowing whether there

are differences in how rural, suburban and urban Kansans view bicycle/pedestrian needs,” Pepper said. “We are also surveying public agencies on how KDOT can best serve cities, counties, regional planning organizations and others to promote local objectives related to safe biking and walking.”

KDOT planners are also interested in identifying possible collaborations and cost sharing arrangements to best leverage limited resources for the greatest impact, she said.

An 18-member Kansas Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan Advisory Board is providing multiple perspectives and guidance on this study that will be completed by fall 2013. The consultant team includes the Transportation Research Institute of the University of Kansas, with Smalley Community Planning LLC., Fairway, Kansas.

New mental health initiative announced

Kansas Governor Sam Brownback announced recently an initiative to provide \$10 million in targeted funding to better provide mental health services to the state’s most at-risk and challenging populations, as well as the creation of a panel of experts to re-evaluate Kansas’ current mental health system and make recommendations for improvements.

Lt. Gov. Jeff Colyer, M.D., Aging and Disabilities Services Sec. Shawn Sullivan and Corrections Sec. Ray Roberts joined the Governor for the plan’s unveiling at Wyandot Center Community Behavioral Health Care, Wyandotte County’s community mental health center that serves the Kansas City area.

“Families with mentally ill loved ones face daily challenges the rest of us can only imagine,” Governor Brownback said. “We chose to make our announcement at Wyandot Center because it is representative of Kansas 27 community mental health centers, which together form our state’s critical mental health safety-net system.”

“These publicly funded community centers work tirelessly to provide accessible, affordable care to those affected. They bring hope to Kansans and their families. I am committed to strengthening this system and making it more effective,” Governor Brownback said.

The initiative will provide targeted funding to better serve Kansas most at-risk and challenging populations. Some mental health patients, despite having access to care, are resistant to treatment and refuse to engage with organizations that can help them. These individuals often end up in crisis and experience repeat hospitalizations.

“This is an area in which our mental health system can be transformed,” Lt. Gov. Colyer said. “This new initiative, like KanCare, will coordinate services around a person’s specific needs. However, this program will target people who are not on Medicaid.”

The Governor’s proposal would establish a collective regional system of services for the

most challenging cases, including intensive case management, care coordination, parent- and peer- support services, crisis-stabilization services and other evidenced-based practices. It also would provide funding to all 27 CMHCs that demonstrate they are focusing on evidence-based programs that target at-risk and challenging consumers.

“We expect this new initiative to result in increasing patient engagement and increased use of the resources that can support these individuals, regardless of where they live in Kansas,” said Sec. Sullivan.

“I expect the new task force

to perform a thorough evaluation of our current mental health system and make recommendations for improvements. Task force members will be experts in mental health, medicine, and criminal justice,” the Governor said. “While many Kansans and their families currently live under the dark cloud of mental illness, my hope is that this new initiative will be the start of a brighter day.”

Call Mike with all your social news. 877-3361

BIRTH

Justin and Debbie Hogan would like to announce the birth of their daughter, Jensen Marie Hogan, born on Dec. 7, 2012 at the Norton County Hospital. Jensen weighed eight pounds, 12 ounces, and was 20.5 inches long. She has two big brothers to welcome her home, Hunter, 11, and Kaylor, 8. Jensen is the granddaughter of Dave and Nancy Hogan of Long Island, and the great-granddaughter of Wave Lee Hogan of Norton, and Dean and Adelia Wilnerd of Almena.



Let’s go bananas for Bananas Foster Mallobet

One of my favorite banana stories is the grade schooler who told his teacher he knew how to spell “banana” but he just didn’t know when to stop! Think about it . . .

When I was a child bananas were not as readily available as they are today. Dad had a big sign he’d stick in the window when bananas came in and he always counted on selling at least twenty packages of strawberry Jell-O that day because every family in town would be eating strawberry banana Jell-O that evening. Bananas arrived at the grocery store in wedge shaped wooden crates, designed to suspend this delicate fruit and prevent bruising. No lids to crush them either so they had to be closely inspected for “critters” before they were put out for sale. Open tops were also necessary to allow ripening in transport from the Texas coast where they came in green as grass from Honduras. These days bananas are ripened with chemical gas pumped into semi-trailer loads.

I once photocopied a cardboard-mounted picture dated 1898 for a library patron. Taken at a wedding feast in Almena, it was a faded brown photo looking down from a balcony at a wedding party posed around a banquet table. Each guest held up a half peeled banana, smiling widely in anticipation of their rare treat to come. No champagne cocktails for them!

Although the price of bananas keeps rising, they are still a fruit worth their weight in gold. Vitamins A, B and C plus potassium are packed into every one. Low potassium levels can cause confusion and disorientation to the point it can be often mistaken as

Cook’s Corner

Liza Deines



dementia. A simple blood test reveals the truth and it can be easily corrected. Just make certain one of your five fruits a day is a nice mellow yellow banana.

A large bowl of bananas is set out every day for the residents here to help themselves. Some refuse to even touch one if there is a single dark freckle marring its surface. Others insist on squeezing to judge ripeness, thus creating dark spots that make them unacceptable to others. Statistics, however, show that the fruit with darkened skins contain more cancer-fighting antioxidants, are easier to digest and are a healthier choice than their pretty blonde sisters. Pancakes are a good use for squishy slices. Mash really ripe specimens and bake banana bread enriched with walnuts. Mashed bananas can also be frozen in one-cup increments to use in later baking projects. When the grocer marks black ones down, thrifty cooks snatch them up.

Hot, fast and easy, Bananas Foster (bananas broiled with brown sugar, butter and pecans) is one of my favorite desserts. But wait until you taste frozen Bananas Foster; not fast, not easy, not low calorie, but oh, such a treat for a special occasion!

BANANAS FOSTER MALLOBET

36 large marshmallows

Teaspoon salt

Three and a half cups whole milk

One cup whipped cream
Teaspoon real vanilla extract
One and a half cups bananas
Half cup (or more) toffee bits

In a large microwave bowl, heat marshmallows in half the milk on low setting until partially melted. Remove, stir until smooth and cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally so mixture doesn’t set up. When cool, stir in rest of milk and pour into 9x10 freezer-safe pan; freeze until crystals start to form at edges. Scrape back into bowl and beat smooth, then gently fold in bananas, whipped cream, vanilla and toffee bits. Return to pan and freeze, stirring it up every half hour or so. Will hold in freezer four hours but no longer. Cut into squares to serve. Spoon a bit of caramel ice cream topping on each square and sprinkle on a few more toffee bits just “for pretty”.

The most flavorful banana I ever tasted was purchased in Bangkok from a water taxi. A tiny wizened Asian lady on an equally tiny boat floated up beside us, selling bananas on the stalk for a quarter. We gave her a dollar bill and received a huge grin with our fresh picked, tree ripened fruit.

Liza Deines
1098 NE Independence Ave. #230
Lee’s Summit, MO 64086
childofthe40s@gmail.com
816-554-0398

