

AN ECHO PRESS EDITORIAL

Beware of scams when filing taxes

Many of you filed your taxes weeks ago. Some like to wait until the last minute.

But if you're an early bird or a procrastinator or somewhere in-between, you face the same threat – con artists who resort to all sorts of scams to trick you into paying them or sharing personal information.

The Better Business Bureau sent out a warning to consumers about identity theft and tax-related scams last week. They most often start with a phone call and take two basic forms. In the first version, the IRS “agent” says you owe back taxes and pressures you into paying by prepaid debit card or wire transfer. If you don't comply, the scammer threatens you with arrest and fines. In the other version, scammers claim they are issuing tax refunds and ask you for personal information so they can send your refund. This information can later be used for identity theft. Scammers also use this approach to target college students by claiming a “federal student tax” has not been paid.

These impostors often go to great lengths to appear real, the bureau warns. The scammer may give a fake badge number and name. Your Caller ID may look like the call is coming from Washington, D.C.. Con artists sometimes follow up scam calls with an email, which uses the IRS logo, colors, and official-sounding language. In many instances, these scams start with a serious and official sounding “robocall” recording.

You may be pressured to act quickly. Scammers typically try to push you into action before you have time to think. The IRS will give you the chance to ask questions or appeal what you owe. Also, their first contact with you will always be by mail, not phone or email. In fraud scenarios, payment must be made by wire transfer, prepaid debit card, or other non-

traditional payment methods. These methods are largely untraceable and non-reversible. The IRS will never demand immediate payment, require a specific form of payment, or ask for credit card or debit card numbers over the phone.

The best way to avoid tax identity theft, according to the bureau, is to file your taxes as early as possible. File before a scammer has the chance to use your information to file a fake return.

Jot down your six-digit Identity Protection PIN (IP PIN) from the IRS before you file your return. This is a six-digit number, which, in addition to your Social Security number, confirms your identity.

It is important to note that you cannot opt out once you get an IP PIN. Once you apply, you must provide the IP Pin each year when you file. The IRS will provide your IP PIN online and then send you a new IP PIN each December by postal mail.

Remember, the IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by email, text message or social media to request personal or financial information. This includes requests for PIN numbers, passwords or similar access information for credit cards, banks or other financial accounts.

Only deal with trustworthy tax preparation services. For many people, major life changes, business ownership, or simply a lack of knowledge about the ever-changing tax laws make finding a trustworthy tax preparer a good idea, the bureau advises.

If you are the victim of tax identity theft, contact the IRS at 800-908-4490. You should also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint) or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP. The FTC also offers a personalized identity theft recovery plan at [identitytheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov).

Police to partner with college students

Spring is nearly in sight on the calendar; however, by looking at the extended forecast, it's a bit further away



SCOTT KENT
In the Know

than any of us would prefer. With spring will come a renewed sense of change, new life, and energy. Our staff continues to go through changes in assignments, training and making our agency a trusted partner in the community. As we approach spring, I would like to inform you about a few things happening here at the Alexandria Police Department.

Officer Brandon Plumski attended a two-week instructional course on teaching DARE to our fifth-graders in the Alexandria school district. He finished on a Friday and was in the classroom first thing on Monday, instructing his first lesson.

Officer Shem Baker has finished two weeks of classroom training and has a week of practical field training to complete his certification as a Drug Recognition Expert. Officer Baker's training will allow him to detect and arrest persons under the influence of drugs while driving and provide training to the rest of our staff. In the

past 24 months, we have arrested more offenders under the influence of drugs while driving than we have for driving under the influence of alcohol. We are projecting these trends while they continue to rise.

This week we will be selecting four first-year law enforcement students to work with the City of Alexandria in the police department and building department as an intern partnership between the Alexandria Technical and Community College and the City of Alexandria. These students will assist with parking enforcement, crash reports in parking lots, nuisance complaints, found and lost property calls, traffic control during special events, and several other duties. This position will be called a Community Service Officer and have a visible uniform; however, it will not be confused with a police officer or sheriff's deputy.

The purpose of this project is to develop the skillsets of these students and prepare them for working with the communities they serve in the future while also assisting our community with a workload in the summer months. We also know that fewer young people are going into policing, and we would love for these young students to stay in our community. We posted

an open position for a police officer and will be going through selection and onboarding over the next several months. We hope to have our team of students and new police officers visible in Alexandria by the end of May.

I am excited to report that we are in the middle of our local Special Olympics fundraising efforts and will conclude on Friday afternoon at Discovery Middle School for the Cool School Plunge. We are in the 16th year of fundraising for Special Olympics Minnesota, and Sgt. Keith Melrose has been the driving force along with Officer Darcie Zirbes at his side. This year's fund-raising efforts surpassed the million-dollar mark in our community. The plunge at Arrowood on Feb. 27 raised nearly \$73,000, and currently, the Cool School Plunge for Friday is at roughly \$40,000. In comparison, the next school district behind Alexandria in the state has raised \$16,000. A special thank you to District 206 and Lukas Gotto, the Unified Special Olympics Club advisor, for all the work and awareness you have brought to students about Special Olympics!

Spring is in the air!
Scott Kent is the Alexandria police chief. In the Know is a rotating column written by community leaders from the Douglas County area.

Ukraine journalists bravely cover invasion despite dangers around them

Journalists are essentially observers — impartial recorders of events, games, meetings, controversies, good deeds and many other happenings that surround us every day. By design, they report from the sidelines and aren't part of the news itself. Once they have published one story, they immediately move on to another.

But watching the horrifying news every day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, I think often of our fellow journalists in that country. They are no longer simply observers of what is going on around them.

They are fearing for their lives and the future of their country, all while reporting on the invasion.

Since early 2020, several of us at the Duluth News Tribune, Superior Telegram and Cloquet Pine Journal have met on Zoom with Ukrainian journalists from the 20 Minutes newspaper in Kyiv. We first connected through the IREX journalism program, an international nonprofit.

Through an interpreter, we discuss various journalism topics a few times a year. Though there is a bit of a language barrier, we enjoy talking shop. One thing is understood in any language — their passion for providing the best journalism to their readers.

We hoped to host some of them this spring or summer and potentially travel to Kyiv ourselves to learn more about each other and our approaches to journalism.

But now their country is under attack and their future is in doubt. A few days ago, they were sheltering every other hour due to the Russian bombings. I can't begin to imagine working under such frightening circumstances.

I received a message from Taras Borosovskyy, an investigative reporter with 20 Minutes, Friday morning.

“The invasion has ... practically turned the newsroom work upside down,” he wrote. “The communications within the newsroom are done via separate chats. Part of the personnel has moved to more secure places: mainly managers and workers of the production department that are not involved in the work of the website.”

“As of today, we realize that most likely we will not return to the previous work mode. Basically, all activities have moved to online. The print product of the newspaper has stopped since there is no opportunity to deliver. ... The newsroom is running out of money and basically we remain fully out of revenue sources due to the closure of all business and stop of work of all advertisers. But, overall, the situation is critical and our future is absolutely uncertain.”

Borosovskyy said the team may move to a new location.

“Depending on the further development of events, we might need ... relocation of the newsroom office and evacuation of the newsroom with families to the western regions of Ukraine,” Borosovskyy said. “But in no case are we planning to stop the work of the newsroom.”

It sure puts some perspective on the array of things that we stress about daily in the newsroom but are only minor issues after all. Despite the incredible hardships they are facing, their website continues to churn out coverage of the invasion. You can check it out at www.20minutes.fr (The site can be translated to English).

Those journalists have my utmost admiration. Please take a few moments to visit their website. You will be reading coverage of the Ukraine invasion directly from the people living through it — journalists who are not only observers, but also residents of Ukraine experiencing the same horrors of the Russian invasion as their friends and neighbors.

Rick Lubbers is the editor of the Duluth News Tribune

1972: Most want stores open Friday nights

1997 – 25 years ago: A project to extend city water to all unserved properties in Alexandria is now estimated to cost \$3 million – \$700,000 more than planned two months ago.

Costs have increased because the project now includes soon-to-be annexed areas and new sewer connections. The council remains strongly committed to the project, however, and voted unanimously to call for bids.

1972, 50 years ago: A survey conducted by the Jefferson High School retailing class under the direction of Elsworth

Holm and requested by the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce following a survey conducted by the Alexandria Technical School students, showed that 63% of those surveyed give overwhelming support for having stores open on Friday nights. Monday nights came in second with 56%. Of those surveyed, 66% said that newspaper advertising had the most influence on their buying decisions. Students selected names at random from the telephone directory, surveying 514 people on a variety of questions.

1997, 25 years ago: Two local theater groups will participate in a play festival at the Central Lakes College Theatre in Brainerd, the 13th biennial Play Festival of the Minnesota Association of Community Theatres. The Alexandria Area Arts Association will present a part of “The Daughters of Edward D. Boit.” Cast members include Lindsay Watts, Alyssa Petefish, Kim Johnson and Melissa Jones. The Prairie Wind Players of Barrett will present a part of “A Piece of My Heart.” Cast members include Dany Peterson, Heidi Boes, Betsy Ostenson, Sharon Brutlag, Gina Ehlers, Brenna Jones and Danni Nelson.

2012, 10 years ago: A building on Alexandria's North Nokomis that has housed many businesses over the years, from used car dealerships to Cowing Robards rental center, was recently torn down. It's being replaced by a 12,000

square foot office, showroom and service center for Boomerang Marine and Sports. The project is expected to increase the market value of the land from slightly below \$600,000 to \$1.14 million.

Doege Precision Machining has changed its name to Alexandria Precision Machining and is now a division of Alexandria Industries. This name change reflects the ability of the Alexandria facility to offer their customers an expanded scope of products and services from the four divisions of Alexandria Industries, all with a single call.

Just For Fun, 1962 – 60 years ago: Jerry Rud served aboard the destroyer USS NOA that retrieved the “Friendship 7” spacecraft that carried Marine Lt. Col. John Glenn on his three-orbit flight around earth. The crewmen brought the shuttle aboard and assisted the astronaut in leaving it. The Mercury-Atlas 6 spacecraft, named Friendship 7, was the first American orbital spaceflight, which took place on Feb. 20, 1962.

1897 – 125 years ago: A new departure has been made at Fifield's lumber yard. To compete with native lumber, they are selling good dry siding at \$11 per thousand. Come and see it.

Sports Trivia, 1972 – 50 years ago: Jefferson High School's star cager Rick Banke was one of 33 Minnesota school cagers selected to WCCO Radio's All-State Basketball Team of the Week on Thursday, March 9. Honors were given on “Prep Parade,” devoted for 16 years to the coverage of high school sports and band news.

Also in 1972: Two hundred and sixteen boys have turned out for the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade wrestling program started by Jefferson High School's head wrestling coach Ron Pfeffer. Coaching programs are going on at Carlos, as well as Lincoln and Washington elementary schools and it has been necessary to enlist the aid of high school varsity grapplers as coaching assistants. Weights of the boys vary from 50 pounds to 150.

Rachel Barduson of Alexandria is a regular contributing columnist to the Echo Press Opinion page.

Letters to the editor policy

We encourage readers to use the public forum this newspaper provides by writing a letter to the editor. Letters must be signed and include both a phone number and address for verification purposes, but only the writer's name and city of residence will appear in print.

Letters should be typed, double-spaced and limited to no longer than two pages. If typewritten material cannot be provided, we ask that letters be clearly written or printed and double-spaced.

We reserve the right to refuse to publish letters. All writers will be limited to only one letter to the editor every 30 day period. There will be no exceptions.

Columns, guest editorials and letters appearing on this page do not necessarily reflect the opinion of this newspaper. The authors are clearly identified as are their affiliations whenever possible.