

Morning News

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Hunger on the rise locally

Cost of living lower in Bingham County, but so is income level

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BLACKFOOT — Bingham County's cost of living is lower than the state average, but its median household income is lower as well, according to the Idaho Hunter Relief Task Force's new Idaho Hunger Atlas.

The county's self-sufficiency wage is listed at \$21.86 per hour versus Idaho's \$22.94 per hour, while its real median household income is \$21,591 compared to the state median of \$43,815.

"Even if you have two wage earners at minimum wages, they still don't make enough," said Kathleen Pressler-Hall, regional director for

the Catholic Charities of Idaho and task force representative.

Regionally, Bingham County's 12.8 percent poverty rate is higher than neighboring Bonneville County but lower than Bannock County.

Median income is lower than both neighbors, which Pressler-Hall said is partly an economic issue because Bingham County's predominantly

small businesses are unable to pay higher wages.

"That's one of the things we're challenged with," she said. "I think the other challenge for Bingham is that we don't have as many resources."

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HUNGER, continued from 1A

Pressler-Hall said the difference between the median income of single males and of single females — \$31,950 compared to \$21,591 — struck her, especially considering 829 families are headed by a single mother.

Child poverty rate is connected to those statistics, she said. The rate for Bingham County is 17.2 percent, while the rate for Idaho is 15.9 percent.

“There’s a direct correlation,” she said.

Pressler-Hall said Catholic Charities of Idaho is also serving a greater number of seniors through its food distribution.

“There’s a higher number of older folks needing assistance with some basics,” she said. “That’s the other thing I find scary. I’m getting older myself.”

According to Pressler-Hall, hunger can be addressed from two angles: charity and justice, which seeks to answer why these issues exist.

“We talk about charity and we talk about justice,” she said. “We’ve got wonderful charities going on

Food Stamp change

Starting May 1, Idaho residents will no longer be restricted to less than \$2,000 worth of assets, such as bank accounts and vehicles, to qualify for food stamps.

A family of three’s gross income cannot exceed \$1,984 per month. The change will be valid for one year from the day it goes into effect.

with our food distribution and the work SEICAA does, but I hope this study moves us into the justice piece.”

Pressler-Hall said concerned individuals can start by donating to the Idaho Food Bank and other local agencies and food drives.

Those who are advocacy-minded are encouraged to become informed about hunger and poverty legislation and view the Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force’s Web site to learn about the issues.

The Idaho Hunger Atlas resulted from a study contracted through Boise State University. It provides data about economic and demographic indicators and federal nutrition assistance programs.

To download the atlas, visit www.idahohunger.org.