

REPORTS AND SHORTS

IRS offers free software

The Internal Revenue Service is offering free tax preparation software to more than 3.8 million Illinois taxpayers who made less than \$58,000 last year.

To help people get a jump on their taxes before the Jan. 31 filing season opens, the IRS announced the immediate availability of Free File on the IRS.gov website.

BU project wins recognition

Two major building projects designed by the Dewberry architectural firm in Peoria have been recognized by American School & University magazine for outstanding design.

The modernization of Westlake Hall at Bradley University was showcased in the "Outstanding Adaptive Reuse" category along with a project for the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Fla.

Westlake Hall, which originally opened on the Bradley campus in 1897, is the first LEED-Gold building on campus.

Morton EDC luncheon set

Robert Blain, owner of Blain's Farm & Fleet, will be the keynote speaker at the Morton Economic Development Council's annual luncheon from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday at the Best Western/Ashland House in Morton. Tickets are \$35 and \$45. Register online at <http://www.mortonedc.org>.

Truckers head for Civic Center

The Mid-West Truckers Association will host its 52nd annual Convention and Truck Show at the Peoria Civic Center from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday, Jan. 31, and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 1.

The show is expected to attract 5,000 people. Those attending will see displays of the newest tractors, trailers, engines, parts and accessories.

Admission to the convention is free, but attendees should print a ticket at www.mid-westtruckers.com.

New Aldi store opens

Aldi opens a new store at 251 Clock Tower Drive in East Peoria Friday. This outlet will replace locations at 210 S. Western Ave. and 250 S. Main St. in East Peoria. Both stores closed on Thursday.

The new store will be open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday.

Goodwill to offer workshops

Goodwill of Central Illinois has partnered with Spoon River College to offer free computer and job readiness workshops at the college's outreach centers in Canton and Macomb.

Three workshops are available. Computer Skills for the Workplace teaches basic computer skills. Get Your Skills Together focuses on creating an effective resume and navigating online job sites. Nail the Interview covers techniques and skills needed for a successful interview. Individuals can take just one workshop or attend all three.

Goodwill is also offering services in these communities designed to help homeless veterans and veterans who need to overcome barriers to employment. For more information, call 369-8878.

Peoria Maaco gets certified

The Maaco store at 4748 N. Brandywine Drive has been named a certified center by the franchise chain.

One of the oldest continually operating Maaco centers in the country, the outlet opened in Peoria in 1975. For more information, contact owner Robert Pohl at 685-4748.

KEY FINDING

Former Peorian's firm creates way for travelers to be reunited with lost valuables

BY STEVE TARTER
OF THE JOURNAL STAR

PEORIA — If you've ever left your laptop behind at the airport, you're not alone.

Nearly 2,000 laptops are lost at U.S. airport security checkpoints each day, said Gordon Burns, CEO of My Stuff Lost and Found, an Atlanta, Ga.-based company that offers the trademarked Okoban service that provides global protection for phones, keys, cameras, passports, credit cards and luggage, as well as laptops.

Only about one-third of laptops left behind at airports are successfully returned because the owner cannot be found, said Burns. The remaining two-thirds are sold as salvage, he said.

Burns said the Okoban name comes from the Japanese code of honor, where returning items to rightful owners is a way of life.

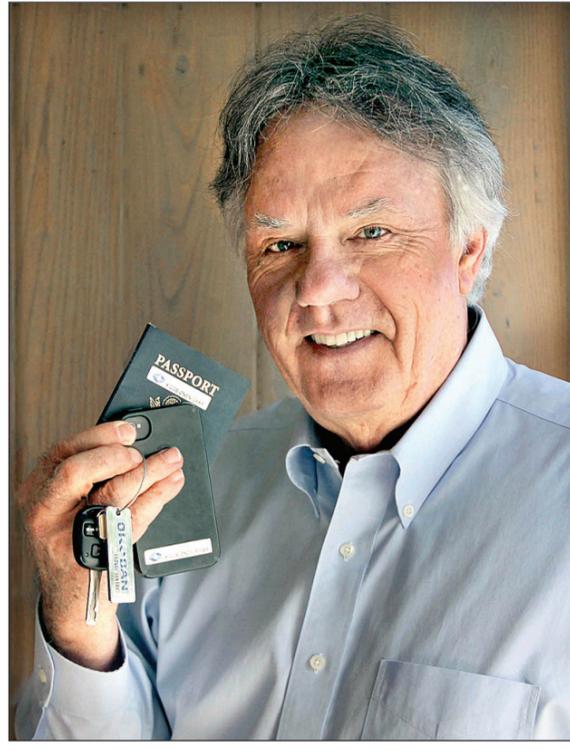
"Now, with Okoban, any lost laptop or valuable can find its owner. Often, the lost valuable finds the owner before the owner realizes the item is lost," he said.

The system is simple, said Burns, noting that travelers purchase an ID tag and then apply it to their item. That ID number is registered at Okoban.com. If an item is lost, the finder can email and text the owner a recovery location through the Okoban website, he said.

In addition to applying identification to an article, travelers also can take steps to protect laptops while streamlining the airport security process, said Burns.

"Checkpoint friendly" laptop bags, recently encouraged by the Transportation Security Administration, are now available that allow laptops to remain in bags for screening, he said.

"Screening 2 million passengers per day in 450 U.S. airports is a daunting task. Anything you can do to make the job easier and to streamline the secu-



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Gordon Burns is an architect, now based in Atlanta, Ga., who worked for 30 years in Peoria. Some of his projects include the Twin Towers, the Bradley communications building and the former PJS Publications Building. He's currently involved with an online company that features a global lost and found service for keys, passports, luggage and mobile devices.

rity process is in the best interest of the traveler," he said.

Mystufflostandfound.com is the online gateway to Okoban's tracking service for valuables and the global lost and found service, said Burns, noting that the Georgia company was founded in 2012.

"We're still fairly small at this point," he said.

While the online endeavor may be just getting off the ground, Burns has plenty of experience in the architectural field. He founded his own firm in 1974. Since then, he estimates his company has designed or developed more than \$3 billion worth of properties across the country.

Before moving to Atlanta, Burns practiced architecture in Peoria for 30 years. "I worked on projects like the Twin

Towers, the Becker Building as well as buildings on the Bradley University campus and at area hospitals," he said.

"I miss all those great years in Peoria," said Burns, adding that he stays in touch with central Illinois by regularly reading the Journal Star online.

It was an item in the paper's "Random Acts of Kindness" where someone reported having a set of keys returned that reminded him of the new online effort. "With our lost-and-found system, we say it's where technology and good will come together," said Burns.

Steve Tarter's phone number is 686-3260, and his email address is starter@pjstar.com. Follow his blog, MindingBusiness.com, on pjstar.com and follow him on Twitter @SteveTarter.

FARM NOTES

Farmland sales remain strong

Land sales finished strong in 2013, according to Omaha-based Farmers National Company. It was also a big year for land auctions.

Out of 829 properties sold by Farmers National Company in 2013, more than 40 percent sold at auction.

While land prices have stabilized compared to the double-digit price increases seen in recent years, levels are at historical highs, the company noted. Prices per acre for high-quality land went as high as \$12,000 to \$13,000 per acre in areas of Indiana, Illinois, Iowa and Nebraska.

Farmers continue to be the primary land buyers, with investor interest more guarded as land prices have increased, reported Farmers National.

Drainage, water issues are seminar topics

The Farming in 2014 seminar to be held Friday, Feb. 7, at the Peoria County Farm

Office, 1716 N. University St., will offer a morning session on cover crops and a weather outlook followed by a noon barbecue sandwich lunch.

After lunch, Dennis Brooks of D. Brooks Excavating near Glasford will provide information on draining farm fields through the use of tile and other means. Lauren Lurkins, director of natural and environmental resources for the Illinois Farm Bureau, will cover regulations facing area farmers on water issues.

Sprayer Specialties opens in Brimfield

Sprayer Specialties has opened a store in Brimfield with Reid Baker as manager. "We have a 4,200 square foot steel building off Route 150 currently getting filled with parts and components needed to outfit any farmer or custom applicator for the upcoming planting/spraying season," said Baker.

The telephone number is (855) 778-8500.

FOOD AND FARM



ALAN GUEBERT

Farm bill too long hostage to politics

According to most Capitol Hill sources the once-2012, then-2013 and now 2014 farm bill should clear its final hurdle before the end of January so Congress — after three years of ugly fighting — finally can approve a new farm law.

Passage brings no glory. Golly, Abraham Lincoln got himself elected president, raised an army, built a navy, turned the tide in the Civil War and passed the Emancipation Proclamation in less time than this Congress finally agreed on nothing more threatening than how to spend \$100 billion a year for the next five years.

By any standard, that record holds more shame than achievement.

The failure to get a farm law before the old one expired in 2012 was tied to the presidential election that year. The rump caucus of House Republicans wanted to deny the Obama White House any legislative achievement to crow about during its re-election campaign.

And, it did. So a minority of the House majority sidetracked the farm bill and forced the nation to wait another year.

The 2013 fight centered on how deeply Congress would cut SNAP, the nation's biggest food assistance program, that had ballooned from 28.2 million recipients and \$34.6 billion in 2008 to 46.6 million recipients and \$74.6 billion in 2012.

The Senate and House both agreed on multibillion-dollar cuts to, in part, finance an expansion of farmer-favored crop insurance. The Senate thought \$8 billion would do; the House wanted \$40 billion, and it voted to strip SNAP from the farm bill as proof of its seriousness.

Today, however, the about-to-be-approved 2014 bill not only folds SNAP back into the farm bill: The House's deep, \$40 billion cut itself was deeply cut to close near the Senate's 2013 figure of less than \$10 billion.

So what was that year really all about?

Was it an impressive show of muscle by the tea party wing of a split Republican House majority or was it a display of collective ag group weakness to stay out of the SNAP budget fight in order to finance fatter government insurance schemes?

Whatever the reason, most major farm and commodity organizations — excluding the National Farmers Union — stared at their belly buttons when asked to take a stand against House cuts to not feed Americans even as they continued to lobby hard for more government subsidies to "feed the world."

In the end, the restoration of SNAP to the farm bill and the likelihood of just \$9 billion in SNAP cuts shows more about the political reality of farm bills than the congressional partisanship and farm group wimpmanship that goes into 'em.

According to the Wall Street Journal, seven of the top 10 states with the highest percentage of food stamp recipients (in descending order: Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Kentucky, Georgia, Alabama and West Virginia) "are some of the reddest states on the electoral map. Eleven of their 14 senators are Republican and their House delegations are all Republican."

So, what was this yearslong delay about if Barack Obama was easily re-elected president and one out of five citizens in the most solidly Republican states on the electoral map are the biggest beneficiaries of SNAP?

Part of it, so the story goes, was the adamant opposition by House Speaker John Boehner to a proposed change in dairy policy he described as "Soviet-style" supply management.

But the biggest reason it took so long is that Congress no longer resembles America. A mid-November Gallup poll found that only 9 percent of all Americans approved of "the way Congress did its job."

Nine percent. What do those folks see that you and I don't?

The Farm and Food File is published weekly through the U.S. and Canada. His column appears in the Journal Star every other week. Contact Alan Guebert at www.farmandfoodfile.com.

What's coming SUNDAY?

The SUNDAY JournalStar

RURAL HOSPITALS: The Affordable Care Act is likely to bring significant changes to how small hospitals serve rural communities across the country. *Local.*



Look for the Journal Star Extra – 2013 in Photos in this Sunday's Peoria Journal Star. Readers will enjoy the Journal Star's photographers' best work from 2013.



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