

Tame the clutter
Use these professional tips to get your garage in tiptop shape: B5

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WEDNESDAY

March 9, 2011

All-star show
Seniors to put their skills on display for one last time **B1**



The public speaks

Dozens testify against Medicaid cuts **C1**



The Seven-day Menu Planner

Lay out a week of meals with our handy guide **B7**



Sean Ruppel, CEO of Valued Merchant Services, explains in his Ammon office Monday morning how the company has been expanding by offering merchants lower processing charges on credit and debit card purchases.



Monte LaOrange
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School levies pass

By MICHAEL NEARY
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Voters in Idaho Falls School District 91 and Bonneville Joint School District 93 approved supplemental levies Tuesday, two of 12 levies approved throughout eastern Idaho.

District 91 Superintendent George Boland considered the outcome of the election an important show of support for educators.

"I hope teachers will take this as a vote of confidence," Boland said.

In all, nine supplemental levies were approved by voters, along with three plant facilities levies. Supplemental levies needed only a simple majority to pass. Plant facilities levies needed more than a simple majority, depending upon how much money a district requested.

District 91's levy was approved 2,861 to 624.

District 93 Superintendent Charles Shackett said he was "thrilled" by the results in the Bonneville election but

■ D93 voters passed measure 1,532-494

LEVIES, Continued on Page A3

More bang for the buck

Ammon-based credit-card processor growing

Valued Merchant Services currently has accounts in 35 states and Canada and hopes to expand to more countries.

By SVEN BERG
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Half of a percentage point doesn't sound like much, but Adam Cromwell knew it could add up.

So when a sales representative for a credit-card processing company promised he could lower the amount Cromwell paid per transaction from 3 percent to 2.5 percent, the owner of ShipPro in Ammon jumped at it.

As part of the agreement, Cromwell had to sign a four-year contract with the company, he said. But that wouldn't be a problem — unless, of course, the promised savings never materialized.

Which is exactly what happened.

In the first month of the new contract, Cromwell said the percentage he paid for processing credit-card transactions actually jumped to about 4.5 percent. He said he was livid, to put it mildly.

"We're growing by over 100 percent, for sure, every year. I still can't find anything that I can do that I can make more money than this."

SEAN RUPPEL
Valued Merchant Services CEO

He wanted out of his contract, but in order to end it, he had to pay an early termination fee, as well as some other not very fun fees.

"Everyone always says, 'We can save you some money,'" Cromwell said. "It was a \$2,000 lesson by the time I got out of it."

Cromwell paid his way out of his contract just in time for the 2010 Christmas season. He then turned to Valued Merchant Services, a credit-card processing company headquartered a couple of blocks east of ShipPro.

He said Valued Merchant Services' representatives didn't try to sell him on a half-point reduction. Anyone promising that kind of savings simply wasn't being honest, they told him. They did say they could cut his processing costs to less than 3 percent. And there

would be no long-term contract.

Valued Merchant Services CEO Sean Ruppel said most of his business's customers don't have contracts. The point, he said, is "just to keep us honest. It keeps us doing what we say we're going to do or else (clients) are going to leave."

Ruppel broke into the business of credit-card processing services in 2004 for good, old-fashioned reasons: He wanted more money. A student at Brigham Young University-Idaho, he said he was skinning logs for a log-house company in Rigby, raking in about \$8 an hour.

He started out selling processing accounts for a flat fee. But he wanted residual income, so he moved toward opening his own business. Today, he said, Valued has 35 sales representatives, five full-time

employees and manages some 5,000 accounts in 35 states across the U.S. and Canada. He said the company is now looking to expand into more foreign countries.

Besides requiring no long-term contracts for most clients, Ruppel said, a few other selling points have helped his business grow, including wholesale rates and fees, the ability to electronically debit and credit checking accounts, and, most importantly, next-day funding for clients.

"We're growing by over 100 percent, for sure, every year," Ruppel said. "I still can't find anything that I can do that I can make more money than this."

Like the savings Valued offered Cromwell and ShipPro in November, the margins Ruppel works with aren't very sexy to look at. But they're real and they keep him in business, Ruppel said.

"We're making the money on volume. It's not margin," he said.

That is fine with Cromwell. "I've been nothing but pleased with them," he said.

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House OKs one of Luna's school reform bills

The teacher labor and contract negotiations bill now only needs Otter's signature.

By CLARK CORBIN
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BOISE — Members of a divided Idaho House approved one of the Students Come First education reform bills after a lengthy floor debate Tuesday.

House members voted 48-22 to approve the labor and contract negotiations bill, with nine Republicans joining the House's 13 Democrats in opposing the plan.

The measure proposed by Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna previ-

INSIDE
Boise woman leads effort to recall schools chief Luna / C4



ously cleared the Senate and is headed to the desk of Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, who promoted and helped draft the reform proposal.

As did their counterparts in the Senate, House Democrats forced lawmakers to read the entire 25-page bill aloud. Lawmakers customarily ask for unanimous approval to skip the reading of bills.

If enacted, Senate Bill 1108 would eliminate continuing contracts for Idaho teach-

ers who have not yet secured that benefit, which sometimes is referred to as tenure.

The bill would create two new classes of teacher contracts. New teachers would be given one-year contracts, while districts would have the option to give teachers with four or more years of experience a two-year pact.

It also would give school principals the final say over hiring teachers who apply for jobs.

Rep. Linden Bateman, an Idaho Falls Republican and longtime educator, supported the plan.

■ House is expected to consider a pay-for-performance plan for teachers this morning

REFORM, Continued on Page A3



Breakfast Briefing.....A2
Classified.....D1
Comics.....D4
Commodities.....C3
Crime Log.....C3
Engagements.....C3
Family.....B5
Games.....D5
Movies.....B8
Obituaries.....C2
Opinions.....A6
Sports.....B1
Stocks.....A3
Upper Valley Calendar.....C3
Weather.....A2
Weddings.....C3
West.....C1

43 High / 28 Low

Today: Mostly cloudy.
Forecast: A2

