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Firm creates symbiosis between advertisers, state parks

SMALL BUSINESS

Pasadena-based Government Solutions Group's sponsored programs help fund sites in several states. The money has been used for such projects as planting trees and creating playgrounds.

September 29, 2009 | Sherine El Madany

State parks bring to mind walking, biking or just relaxing amid beautiful scenery. But outdoor enthusiasts Shari and Christopher Boyer see something else: an efficient marketing tool for businesses.

"Parks are about going out, having fun with your family, hiking," said Shari Boyer, chief executive of a small Pasadena company called Government Solutions Group Inc. "To associate your brand name with something positive is a unique experience, which is exactly what brand owners are looking for and what parks are in need of."

The couple's brainstorm, which caused them to quit their marketing jobs and start their own company in 2003, is a program known as 20% For Parks, in which state parks give Government Solutions Group the right to sell advertisements in welcome kits given free to visitors. In return, 20% of advertising revenue goes to cash-squeezed state parks to help protect natural resources and create recreation opportunities.

Inside each welcome kit's keepsake envelope -- approved by each state park agency and handed out at entrance gates by park rangers -- is a large fold-out map, park highlights, suggested road trips, calendar of events and other information.

The kits are produced at no cost to the states, taxpayers or park visitors and are distributed in 11 states that host some of America's largest state parks, including California, New York, Texas, Florida and Ohio. The Boyers hope to add about three states next year.

"Parks are that uncluttered advertisement element where there is little to no advertisement," said Christopher Boyer, Government Solutions Group's president and chief operating officer. "People who go to parks have a very relaxed mind-set, so they are open to ads, whereas they fast-forward commercials on TV because there's an overload on advertisement."

Money raised by the 20% For Parks program has gone toward such efforts as planting more than 1 million trees in California state parks, creating seven playgrounds in New York state parks and providing four vehicles to state parks in Utah and Colorado.

"Gone are the days when advertisers put their brand on a wall. They're looking for programs," Christopher Boyer said.

California has been working with Government Solutions Group for five years.

"They help raise private funds for donations that allow us to do things we wouldn't otherwise be able to do," said Ruth Coleman, director of California State Parks.

"The economy is in really bad shape," Coleman said, "and the budget cuts mean that we either have to reduce our parks or find alternative solutions." Government Solutions Group "has been helping us find these creative public-private partnerships."

One of the partnerships is the Reforest California program, which has raised slightly more than \$600,000 to plant trees and put up fire education signs in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, about 50 miles northeast of San Diego. The park was devastated by fire in 2003. Chino Hills State Park also is among the beneficiaries of that program.

Coca-Cola Bottling Co. of Southern California participated in Reforest California by making a donation for each customer purchase, said Terence Fitch, vice president and general manager of the bottler, adding that the program made consumers more involved with the products.

The reforestation effort fits with the company's shifting focus from traditional to cause marketing, Fitch said. "It's absolutely the right thing to do," he said. "It benefits all people involved: employees, customers and consumers."

Others participating in the company's various programs include grocery chain Stater Bros. Markets, Nestle, Cascadian Farm, Odwalla Inc. and Geico, the Boyers said.

"State parks visitors are highly active, very green and concerned about the environment, and very loyal about parks, which makes them a good target audience for participating companies to get their advertisement messages through," Shari Boyer said.

Passionate about the outdoors, the Boyers took their expertise in corporate marketing and applied it to parks. They saw "an opportunity that was untapped" to deliver results to advertisers while funding a cause that benefits society.

Producing each year's welcome kits takes six to eight months and costs about \$800,000, said the Boyers, who employ six full-time staff members and contract with freelance writers, editors and cartographers. The kits are distributed in May and are updated annually.

As part of the company's exclusive deal with the parks, no competitors are allowed to produce similar kits. Government Solutions Group expects to have distributed 6 million welcome kits by the end of 2009, up from 4.5 million in 2008.

But as companies struggle amid financial turmoil, marketing budgets have become tighter, challenging programs such as 20% For Parks.

"The financial crisis did impact us, but we're going to have a positive year. It's just a matter of not growing as quickly as we would have," Christopher Boyer said.

Consequently, they are scrutinizing every dollar spent.

"We're more concerned about costs, and the whole business is a little more precise," he said. "Ultimately, the less money we spend, the more profit share parks get."

Still, Government Solutions Group has managed to see some green, just like the parks it sponsors. Revenue this year has reached \$2 million, short of what the Boyers had projected but up sharply from last year's total \$1 million.

"Despite the current state of the economy, our revenues have almost doubled this year because we are looking away from traditional marketing," Christopher Boyer said. "People are looking for authentic and unique marketing programs, and we provide that."

Shari Boyer said her company's programs have provided \$4.4 million in cash and services for America's state parks in the last four years, saving the parks as much as \$150,000 a year in printing and other costs.

"Corporate social responsibility is a big buzzword right now," she said. "And with what's going on with state budgets, there's a real opportunity for a company to step up and do something."

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- 2) http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/money_co/2009/09/los-angeles-company-recalls-lead-laced-masks-pendants.html

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Los Angeles company recalls lead-laced masks, pendants

September 8, 2009 | 1:50 pm

Team Work Trading of Los Angeles is recalling about 1,400 children's animal masks and pendants because they contain high levels of lead, which is toxic to young children.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission advised consumers to immediately stop using the recalled items and contact Team Work Trading for a refund or exchange.

The recall involves a children's animal mask and four styles of metal pendants with anime symbols.

The mask resembles the face of a cat. The pendants are a dog tag with a fire symbol, in a package labeled "Bleach"; a knife and lion symbol, labeled "Final Fantasy"; a key-shaped topped with a Mickey Mouse symbol, labeled "Kingdom of Hearts" and a burning sun symbol, labeled "Naruto." The pendants were sold with silver-colored chains.

The items were manufactured in China and sold at gift shops and modeling stores nationwide from November 2008 through March 2009 for between \$4 and \$8.

Lead is considered particularly dangerous for children, whose nervous systems are more sensitive to its effects. It can cause brain damage and learning disabilities.

A Team Work Trading spokesman said that no injuries had been reported.



For additional information, consumers can contact Team Work Trading at (213) 680-4489 or visit <http://www.cpsc.gov>.

-- Sherine El Madany

Photos: The recalled products. Credit: Consumer Product Safety Commission



More in: Health/Fitness, Recalls

Product

3) http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/money_co/2009/09/watch-out-for-wildfire-related-scams-agencies-warn.html

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Watch out for wildfire-related scams, agencies warn

September 2, 2009 | 4:46 pm



As if the flames, smoke and ash from Southern California's wildfires weren't bad enough, disasters bring out the scam artists, consumer protection agencies warn. Fire victims need to watch out for phony adjusters, price gougers, tight-fisted landlords and bogus charities.

The [Los Angeles Department of Consumer Affairs](#) cautioned that "some people see disasters as a chance to take advantage of those in need."

After a disaster, consumers should have their insurance company send an adjuster to assess the damage and process the claim.

People calling themselves "public adjusters" don't work for insurance companies and may falsely promise to get consumers more money than their insurance company's adjuster, the local consumer affairs department said. According to the department, such operators usually charge a fee of 10% of the total that the consumer gets from an insurance company but don't get the customer any more money and, in many cases, the consumer is left with even less. For more information or to file a complaint, contact the [Department of Insurance](#) at (800) 927-4357.

After the governor declares an area to be a disaster, it becomes a crime to increase prices of food, repairs, construction, emergency and medical supplies in the disaster area. Gasoline prices may rise no more than 10% in the disaster area. Stores can raise prices more than 10% after a disaster only if the increase is due to price increases from their suppliers. If a store is breaking the law, save your receipts and contact the Department of Consumer Affairs at (800) 593-8222.

The department also said that if a rented home or apartment is badly damaged in a disaster, tenants can move out right away without giving landlords advance notice. Such tenants have the right to get back their security deposit and last month's rent. Landlords have to send this money within three weeks after a tenant moves out.

California Atty. Gen. Jerry Brown said today that Californians who wish to assist fire victims should avoid "sham charities" by closely reviewing disaster-relief appeals before giving.

"After virtually every disaster, scam artists come out of the woodwork to defraud individuals wishing to help victims," Brown said in a statement. "Californians should give only to reputable organizations so their donations don't end up lining the pockets of criminals and opportunists."

Brown said that fraudulent and misleading charitable solicitations are common after disasters -- whether the donation request comes by phone, mail, in front of retail stores, or e-mail. He recommended sticking with charities that are reputable rather than those that spring up overnight.

Similarly, the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer Affairs warned on its website of telemarketers, door-to-door salespeople and e-mails asking for donations to disaster charities, which may be fake.

"Many bogus charities use names that sound like the real ones. Don't be fooled. Give only to charities you know," the department said.

People should avoid giving contributions to solicitors who won't give their name, phone number or written materials, and should never give money to anyone sent to their home to pick up cash. The department also advised consumers to be suspicious of out-of-state groups, especially if their only address is a P.O. Box.

A searchable database of registered charities is available at <http://ag.ca.gov/charities.php>. Consumers can also contact the attorney general office at (916) 445-2021 to find out if a charity is real or to file a complaint. Information on national charities is available from the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance at (800) 575-4483 or www.give.org.

Brown said consumers should not give through e-mail solicitations: A link in an e-mail can lead to a site that looks legitimate but was set up by identity thieves seeking money or personal information. He advised against giving cash. Checks should be made out to the charitable organization and not to the person asking for the donation.

Brown recommended asking what percentage of donations would be used for charitable activities that help victims and how much would fund administrative and fundraising costs, and said to be wary of fundraisers who balk at answering. State law requires solicitors to provide such information if asked.

-- Sherine El Madany

Photo: Charred trees by the side of the road after the Station Fire swept through the Angeles National Forest near La Cañada Flintridge. Credit: Getty Images

4) <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/aug/28/business/fi-robocalls28>

FTC to ban most telemarketing 'robocalls' Sept. 1

August 28, 2009 | Sherine El Madany

The Federal Trade Commission is sending most of those pesky "robocalls" to the junk heap starting Tuesday.

Such prerecorded commercial calls offering services and products such as carpet cleaning or car warranties will be a thing of the past unless telemarketers have written permission from consumers that they want to receive these calls, the commission said Thursday. Violators will face penalties of up to \$16,000 per call.

"American consumers have made it crystal clear that few things annoy them more than the billions of commercial telemarketing robocalls they receive every year," Chairman Jon Leibowitz said in a statement. Previously, telemarketers had to tell consumers how to opt out of receiving robocalls.

There are a few exceptions, though. The commission will exempt calls that aren't trying to sell goods and services to consumers; that category would include debt collections and those providing information, such as flight cancellations and delivery notices.

Other calls not covered include those from politicians, charities that contact consumers directly, banks, insurers, phone companies, surveys and certain healthcare messages such as prescription notifications. The commission doesn't have jurisdiction over them.

Calls made by humans rather than automated systems also will be allowed unless the phone number is on the National Do Not Call Registry.

Consumers who receive an unauthorized call can file complaints with the commission online at www.ftc.gov or by calling (877) FTC-HELP.

"If consumers think they're being harassed by robocallers," Leibowitz said, "they need to let us know, and we will go after them."

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5) http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/money_co/2009/08/page/2/

Frigidaire recalls some electric ranges that turn on by themselves

August 28, 2009 | 7:15 am



Frigidaire is recalling about 200,000 Frigidaire and Kenmore smoothtop electric ranges because of a potential fire hazard.

The surface heating elements can turn on spontaneously without being switched on, fail to turn off after being switched off or heat to different temperatures than selected, posing a fire and burn hazard to consumers, the [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) said.

The products, which have rotary knobs and digital displays, were manufactured in the United States and sold at Sears as well as other national chain stores and independent retailers from June 2001 through August 2009. The ranges cost between \$1,000 and \$2,500.

Consumers should stop using the recalled ranges immediately and contact Frigidaire or Sears to schedule a free repair. Frigidaire has so far received 126 reports of incidents, including four reports of minor burns and two reports of minor property damage, the safety commission said.

Consumers can contact Frigidaire at (800) 449-9812 or visit the firm's recall website at www.smoothtoprangerecall.com where you can type in your range's serial number to see if it is included in the recall. Those who purchased their products at Sears should call Sears at (800) 449-9810.

-- Sherine El Madany

Photo: Example of the recalled ranges. Credit: Consumer Product Safety Commission

6) <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jul/02/business/fi-veterans-jobs2>

Veterans to be trained for green jobs under U.S. program

LABOR

Seventeen groups nationwide, including the Long Beach office of United States Veterans Initiative -- which will receive \$500,000 -- have been awarded grants to train and find jobs for veterans.

July 02, 2009 | Sherine El Madany

A veterans outreach organization in Long Beach was named one of 17 groups nationwide Wednesday to receive a share of \$7.5 million to train veterans for green jobs.

Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis announced the agency grants to provide about 3,000 veterans with training and employment in green jobs. In California, the Long Beach site will get \$500,000 to train more than 100 veterans in Los Angeles County and find work for them. An additional \$300,000 will aid 75 veterans in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Long Beach office of the United States Veterans Initiative will get the \$500,000 grant. In the Bay Area, the \$300,000 went to another nonprofit group, Swords to Plowshares.

"Our goal is to work with 133 veterans, and [we] hope to provide employment placement to 75%, or about 100 veterans," said Greg McCormack, Long Beach director of United States Veterans Initiative.

Established in 1992, the Los Angeles-based organization mainly addresses needs of homeless and at-risk veterans. McCormack said the group's Inglewood office would also participate.

Other states where grants were awarded include Texas, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Indiana and Arizona.

"This grant will provide our veterans with tools and skills that will ensure they are certified and trained in green jobs," Solis said.

Green jobs have recently been the buzzword among U.S. policymakers who say they could be one way to reduce unemployment and greenhouse gas emissions.

Participating veterans will be trained for jobs including residential and commercial solar energy system installation, solar water heater repair, solar energy roofing, and solid waste and wastewater treatment.

California reported a record unemployment rate of 11.5% in May. The state Employment Development Department said Wednesday that the unemployment rate for veterans in the same month was 7%, up from 4.5% a year earlier.

"We are seeing more and more veterans who have been out of work and have become recently homeless due to market problems and layoffs," McCormack said. "Each year at our site we helped 150 veterans get back to work for the last eight years. But this year we are helping 100 veterans get back to work."

McCormack said the grant would help his organization train veterans whose skills were no longer in demand.

The grants are being awarded under the Labor Department's Veterans' Workforce Investment Program.

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7) <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jun/23/business/fi-youth-jobs23>

Solis helps kick off United We Serve in L.A.

The Labor secretary tours La Causa, a job training and education center for at-risk youths 16 to 24.

June 23, 2009 | Sherine El Madany

Wearing a T-shirt labeled "YouthBuild" and wielding a green-paint-covered roller, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis visited Los Angeles on Monday to kick off United We Serve, President Obama's summer service initiative to create change in U.S. communities through long-term volunteer involvement, creating jobs along the way.

"Our hope is our future, and volunteerism is one way of giving back . . . giving hope to youngsters who otherwise couldn't have opportunities, giving them a second chance, a career path," Solis said.

Solis spoke after touring La Causa, a Labor Department YouthBuild program facility that provides job training and education for at-risk youth ages 16 to 24 while building or rehabilitating affordable housing for low-income or homeless families.

That's where the paint came in: YouthBuild pressed Solis into service painting one of the homes for a few minutes.

First Lady Michelle Obama and Cabinet secretaries fanned out across the country Monday to participate in community service projects as part of the launch of United We Serve, which runs through a new National Day of Service and Remembrance on Sept. 11.

President Obama is urging people to help in the nation's economic recovery by volunteering at schools and hospitals and pitching in on community projects such as tutoring and trash pickup.

Robert Zardeneta, executive director of La Causa, said that community service programs provide a lifeline through training and career development at a time when jobs keep disappearing in the Golden State. In May, California's unemployment rate rose to a record 11.5%.

"We are promoting college to young people . . . and 16 of our students will be Bruins next [academic] year," Zardeneta said.

Students are paid to attend La Causa classes and for their construction work. La Causa spruces up houses of low-income residents using environmentally friendly materials.

"We go to homes and teach families in the community how we can be energy efficient. And we are able to save these homeowners between \$20 and \$30 per month by being energy efficient," Zardeneta said.

This year, La Causa has painted six houses and aims to reach 22 houses this summer. Solis said the group would receive a Labor Department grant of \$687,500 this fiscal year and \$1.1 million next year, pending authorization of that budget. The money is mainly earmarked for training and construction wages. - - sherine.elmadany@latimes.com

Obama's trip may strengthen U.S.-Egypt ties

Fostering bilateral trade and investment could benefit both nations and help stabilize political relations, experts say.

By Sherine El Madany

June 4, 2009

As President Obama arrives in Egypt today to deliver a much-anticipated speech on U.S.-Middle East relations, businesspeople on both sides of the world are hoping his trip will pave the way for increased commerce.

Egypt is striving to become a trade hub in the Middle East on the strength of its favorable geographic location, purchasing power and consumer culture. The United States is stuck in the worst recession since the 1930s -- worsened by sluggish consumer spending.

Put the two together and benefits will flow, several trade experts said.

"Egypt can offer U.S. companies many advantages, including a large domestic market of almost 80 million consumers" and Egypt's many bilateral trade agreements with "almost all major world markets," said Rachid Mohamed Rachid, Egyptian minister of trade and industry, in a interview from his Cairo office.

In May, the U.S. and Egypt announced that they would bolster trade and investment ties. Both U.S. and Egyptian trade experts said that fostering bilateral trade and business relations could help stabilize political relations.

"We as an organization believe that trade and business relations are an underpinning relationship with any society," said Chuck Dittrich, vice president of regional trade initiatives with the National Foreign Trade Council in Washington.

Last month, Rachid visited the U.S. and, along with U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, issued a joint statement that said deepening trade ties should mesh well with the strong cooperation between Washington and Cairo on political and security matters.

Ahmed Chebbani, chairman of the Michigan-based American Arab Chamber of Commerce, agreed: "Prosperity and peace go hand in hand. If you don't have one, you can't have the other."

"People, after all, have the same concerns wherever they come from," Chebbani said. "They need housing, healthcare, food. . . . And when you have these things, you have political stability."

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, after meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit in preparation for Obama's trip, promised strong U.S. backing to promote economic opportunity in Egypt. "I want to stress economic opportunity because out of economic opportunity comes confidence, comes a recognition that people can chart their own future," she said.

Egypt is the 36th-largest export market for U.S. goods, totaling \$6 billion in 2008, up from \$5.3 billion in 2007. U.S. imports from Egypt were down 0.3% last year to \$2.4 billion.

U.S. exports to the most populous Arab country include wheat, corn, soybeans and aircraft. Among the imports are petroleum, petroleum products, natural gas, textiles, apparel, steel, cement and cotton.

The Egyptian trade minister said that Egypt wanted to double trade with the U.S. in the next four years but was not discussing a trade agreement.

"This is not a bad or negative thing at all," Rachid said. "It is simply the result of recognition by both sides that this is not necessarily the way to boost trade."

He added that although the U.S. signed trade agreements with several countries in the region, including Jordan, Bahrain, Oman and Morocco, their total trade with the U.S. reached only around \$2 billion.

Dittrich said a trade agreement would be politically unlikely for a Congress more interested in protecting U.S. industry than promoting cheaper goods from abroad.

"Trade protectionism and 'Buy American products' is a symptom of the mood of Congress . . . and skepticism of trade, and the current U.S. administration has to make efforts to counter this skepticism," he said. "They have to come up with a strategy of how they're going to engage with Congress on the issue of free trade before they engage with the rest of the world."

A better approach than a trade agreement, Dittrich said, would be to expand a program under which goods from specified zones in Egypt already enjoy preferential terms in the U.S. market provided that a certain percentage of Israeli goods are used.

Dittrich said business relations with Egypt and the Middle East also would strengthen the Arab world's understanding of the U.S.

"There's a huge population in Egypt and the Middle East who are very young people, born in the last 15 to 20 years. And in the 15-to-20-year period, there's been a lot of controversial and unfortunate images of the role of the U.S. in the world," he said.

"So by engaging in business relations, we can show these young people a different side of the U.S. And I think that's what President Obama is doing by speaking in Cairo and addressing the Muslim world."

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9) <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-madoff29-2009may29,0,3807875.story>

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Madoff victims ask California lawmakers for tax relief

Investors, many of them elderly, want state law changed so they can get back the taxes they paid on income they thought they had earned off their Madoff investments but never received.

May 29, 2009 | Nathan Olivarez-Giles and Sherine El Madany

Calabasas resident Richard Shapiro never made it to his college graduation. Instead, he went to work and spent decades in the commercial real estate industry.

Overnight, he watched a lifetime of savings disappear in the wreckage of Bernard L. Madoff's Ponzi scheme.

"It was sickening to see your life's work disappear in a second," said Shapiro, one of almost 5,000 investors who lost money to confessed swindler Madoff.

On Thursday night, Shapiro and about 65 other Californians gave state senators an earful at a hearing held by the state Senate's Select Committee on Investment Malfeasance to explore possible state tax remedies.

"I understand that the state is broke," the 56-year-old Shapiro said at the forum, held at the Skirball Cultural Center. "But we're more broke. There are people that are starving."

The hearing was held in response to the hundreds of Californians, the majority of whom are elderly with little to no savings left, who have been pushing lawmakers to step in and help recoup money they lost in an investment Ponzi scheme run by Madoff. They want state law changed so they can get back the taxes they paid on income they thought they had earned off their Madoff investments but never received.

In March, Madoff, 71, pleaded guilty in a Manhattan federal court to 11 securities-related fraud counts. At the center of the charges is Madoff's admitted use of new investor money to pay off earlier investors. Many of Madoff's clients were elderly people who relied on their investments into his fund as their only retirement income.

It may take more than a decade to find all of the assets of Madoff's money management firm and pay back victims of the \$65-billion fraud, Stephen Harbeck, president of the Securities Investor Protection Corp., told Bloomberg News on Thursday. The Washington agency, formed by Congress in 1970 to liquidate bankrupt brokerage firms, hired the trustee liquidating Madoff's firm, Investment Securities.

Madoff is slated to be sentenced next month and faces up to 150 years in prison.

The state Senate committee also is trying to quantify the losses in state revenue that might result from any tax law changes to accommodate Madoff victims.

No state law allows people to recover taxes paid on phantom income, and the state doesn't allow victims to claim their losses as a theft loss, Senate Majority Leader Dean Florez (D-Shafter) said in an interview.

The Internal Revenue Service is allowing theft losses from Ponzi schemes to be counted against income from the last five years or future income in the next 20 years.

"What the state Legislature has to figure out now is whether or not we can mirror the IRS actions or if we can find a solution in another way. Either way, we need to find a solution," said Florez, who chairs the committee.

Also attending the hearing was Sen. Tom Harman (R-Huntington Beach). The committee will hold another hearing next month in Sacramento.

Florez acknowledged that the cash-squeezed state isn't in a strong position to return tax money to its citizens, but added, "I don't think the state of California should participate in victimizing people twice. We will in essence be participating in a crime and saying the crime is OK if we keep the money."

Some of the more than 400 Californians victimized by Madoff are rich and famous, including director Steven Spielberg. But most aren't.

Taylor Levin, 15 and a 10th grader at St. Francis High School, said in an interview that he lost \$1,500 of birthday money that he was saving to buy a car.

"I'm turning 16 on Aug. 23 and now because of Madoff, I won't be able to get a car. Also my mom lost my college fund and I will be taking out loans for that."

Marcia Cholodenko, 72 and retired from the Los Angeles Unified School District, told the lawmakers that she and her husband, Paul, "were really counting on these years being the golden years for us because we had money invested with Madoff. . . . For many years, we were comfortable, and now . . . we're just existing."

Elliot Kaye, retired chief operating officer of Parthenia Medical Group Inc., said he lost his \$1.3-million retirement fund, is living on state disability and "if it doesn't turn around, I'm going to go homeless."

"We need immediate assistance and immediate relief, and the state of California is in a position to provide this relief," Kaye, 61, said.

"The state has undeniably reaped the benefits of the taxes we paid on this fictitious income, and it's time for the state to return this money with reasonable return on investment. It's an honorable thing to do."

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10) <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/may/08/local/me-briefs8.S3>

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Raising awareness of conservation in L.A.

May 8, 2009 | 7:43 am

As California struggles with drought, gardening and conservation specialists will gather today for the nation's first National Public Gardens Day to raise awareness of the importance of plant and water conservation.

More than 500 public gardens across the nation will join in the celebration and host speakers who will discuss means of maintaining beautiful landscapes while still complying with water restrictions.

In Los Angeles, National Public Gardens Day events will take place at Descanso Gardens, the Huntington Library and the Los Angeles Arboretum between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m.

"There's more emphasis on people taking care of their home gardens and [growing] vegetables in their home gardens," said Brinda Rees, Descanso Gardens' communications director.

"There's more attention being placed on what homeowners and businesses can do to their gardens. And we see these public gardens as a leader: Here's what we do and what we inspire you to do as well."

Besides learning about gardens and plant conservation, visitors will also have the chance to meet with conservation specialists, including Paul James, host of HGTV's "Gardening by the Yard."

-- Sherine El Madany

11) <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/greenspace/2009/05/public-gardens-celebrated-in-la.html>

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Public gardens to be celebrated in L.A.

May 7, 2009 | 7:07 pm

As California struggles with drought, gardening and conservation specialists will gather Friday for the nation's first National Public Gardens Day to raise awareness of the importance of plant and water conservation.

"In California, water is a big issue right now, and we hope to spread the right information about conservational planting and water conservation," said Madeline Quigley, director of marketing communications for the nonprofit [American Public Gardens Assn.](#)

More than 500 public gardens across the nation will join in the celebration and host speakers who will discuss means of maintaining beautiful landscapes while still complying with water restrictions. In Los Angeles, National Public Gardens Day events will take place at [Descanso Gardens](#), the [Huntington Library](#) and the [Los Angeles Arboretum](#) between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Organizers said they expected the celebration to boost public gardens visits by 5% to 10% nationwide. "There's more emphasis on people taking care of their home gardens and [growing] vegetables in their home gardens," said Brinda Rees, Descanso Gardens' communications director. "There's more attention being placed on what homeowners and businesses can do to their gardens. And we see these public gardens as a leader: Here's what we do and what we inspire you to do as well."

Besides learning about gardens and plant conservation, visitors will also have the chance to meet with conservation specialists, including Paul James, host of HGTV's "Gardening by the Yard."

--Sherine El Madany

12) <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/may/07/local/me-la-marathon7>

L.A. Marathon may be heading back to March

Council committee OKs the move after registrations plummet.

May 07, 2009 | Sherine El Madany

With expected participation in this year's Memorial Day race down nearly 50%, a Los Angeles City Council committee voted Wednesday to move the Los Angeles Marathon back to a Sunday in March beginning next year.

The 26.2-mile event has shifted dates twice -- first to Presidents Day, then to Memorial Day -- since it was acquired by Los Angeles Dodgers owner Frank McCourt in September. It was moved to address complaints from religious leaders, who blamed race-day road closures and traffic congestion for making it difficult for their congregations to get to services.

"The religious community was very passionate not to run it on a Sunday," said City Councilman Tom LaBonge.

But runners complained that Memorial Day heat could be dangerous, and that late May posed scheduling problems for athletes who compete in several marathons each year, including one in San Diego a week later.

Russ Pillar, president of LA Marathon, said in an interview that the race has attracted only about 10,000 entrants, far short of the 19,000 who crossed the finish line last year.

"Again, this is a clear indication to us that the event is being hurt by the movement of the date from March," he said, adding that he supported the committee's decision.

The change must also be approved by the full council.

LaBonge co-wrote the motion to return the race to a Sunday in March.

"There [are] probably some priests that are not happy by my thinking, but I'm trying to do the best for the people," LaBonge said.

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