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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 17, 2009

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Free time during the holiday break? How about learning about money, and maybe winning some?

Oregon kids who participate in "Reading is an Investment" can win \$250 scholarships

SALEM – State Treasurer Ben Westlund has a suggestion for how Oregon schoolchildren can pass the time during the upcoming holiday break -- and it's an idea that could pay dividends.

How about curling up with a book, learning about how money works, and earning a chance at a college scholarship?

You can do all of the above through the Oregon State Treasury's financial literacy program for elementary-aged youths, known as "Reading is an Investment." As part of the outreach effort, 726 school libraries from border-to-border received two donated books that can help students better understand financial concepts, such as the value of saving and the peril of debt.

"Helping our next generation to better understand money is a gift that will keep giving," Treasurer Westlund said. "We all will be better served by equipping kids to make wise decisions in an increasingly complicated financial world."

It's easy and free to participate. Information and entry materials are available through the interactive web portal at the Office of the State Treasurer, www.ost.state.or.us. Click on the "Reading is an Investment" link.

The donated books are provided through a partnership with the Oregon College Savings Plan, the state-sponsored 529 plan that helps families save for college and job training. Students who log sufficient hours reading will be entered into a random drawing in May for one of 100 scholarships, worth \$250 apiece, from the Oregon College Savings Plan.

In the 2008-09 academic year, more than 2,500 children participated. Every Oregon child is eligible, either as part of a class project or on their own at home.

This year's donated books are "A Chair for my Mother," by Vera B. Williams, which illustrates the value of saving through the story of a family that sets aside money following a fire; and "Kids Guide to Money Cents," by Keltie Thomas, which allows readers to determine their "money personality" and even offers business startup advice.

The books were selected by a panel of teachers and librarians, and each book has been aligned state standards in Math, Language Arts, Social Sciences, the Arts, Career-Related Learning, Science and Health and developed activities for each grade level.

Participating students can read the donated books, plus others from an age-based recommended list that is available from the Internet site. Then, students keep track of the hours they read up until the program ends on March 19.

In addition to gleaning information from the website, parents and participants can steer questions to the Office of the State Treasurer at 503-378-4329.

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