

# Vernonia Pride—Getting it Done, Year after Year

By Scott Laird

Sweat was running down my face. I was dirty and wet. I was hungry and thirsty. And I was proud. I had just finished volunteering for the first time for “Make Vernonia Shine,” the annual clean up day organized every year by Vernonia Pride. This is the day when Vernonia’s citizens turn out to pick up garbage, replant flower beds, spread bark dust, paint, trim – whatever needs to be done to make the place sparkle. Visitors passing through town stop and stare in amazement at all the volunteers. Everyone is working together. And I was helping!

Year after year Vernonia citizens follow Vernonia Pride’s lead and show they care about their community. From elementary school students to senior citizens, Vernonian’s show their pride by volunteering on clean up day, working hard together, and then sharing lunch when they finish.

But clean up day is not all Vernonia Pride does for Vernonia, not by a long shot. Take a walk down Bridge Street through the down town corridor, or visit any Vernonia Park and you will see evidence of Vernonia Pride’s work. Those garbage receptacles downtown, Vernonia Pride helped put those there. The flower baskets on the bridge, yep, Vernonia Pride. The log benches outside downtown shops, ditto. The reader board across from city hall, that’s right. Vernonia Pride’s list of accomplishments sure is impressive. The flag pole and war memorial at Shay Park, metal hanging cutouts on downtown street lights, information kiosks in some parks, holiday flags and poles—all these were made possible through the work of Vernonia Pride.

So how did all this get started? That’s what’s so amazing. It all happened in 1994 when a few good citizens picked up a broom and decided to do something about a downtown that was in a state of disrepair. “People could see the need,” said founding member Genny Fisher. “We decided we loved our town too much. We were not going to let it get any worse. We were going to do something about it.”

Deloris Webb and her mother Eleanor Thompson started sweeping the bridge over Rock Creek and

picking up garbage. Others joined by picking up cigarette butts and hanging flower baskets. This led to a series of community meetings that involved city officials, real estate agents, business owners, and lots of school kids. They all had one thing in common, they were all people who wanted to clean up Vernonia. Genny Fisher was the catalyst, with the ideas and the energy to get people moving. Shirley Daughtry was in charge of climbing the ladder and watering the hanging baskets on the bridge.

Word spread and “Vernonia Pride” was born. They produced a newsletter, “Good News”, written by Sandy Welch, which announced on February 22, 1994, that Vernonia Pride had been formed with the theme “Proud Past, Bright Future-Working Together.” This first newsletter also stated “the desire to present a city which is clean and has a sense of community, one that offers recreation for all ages and also has a bright future for those to come.”

Their first big project was an organized clean up day and evening auction. Bill Yeo was the auctioneer at a packed school gymnasium. The funds that were raised were funneled into “betterment projects” for the community. “People would drive by, see us working, and give us a thumbs up,” said Mrs. Fisher.

The group has continued to fundraise, organized the yearly cleanup day, and regularly cares for the flower planters downtown. Their donations have helped add other amenities to our community, like the street light on OA hill, the Scout Cabin at Hawkins

Park, the “Welcome to Vernonia” signs entering town, the water fountain outside the old JC Penney store, and the bricks at Shay Park around the locomotive. They also produce and sell the Historical Walking Tour booklet for downtown.

The work of Vernonia Pride has jump started a feeling of ... well... Pride in Vernonia, and in the members of this community. “Downtown beautification was the goal,” said Deloris Webb. “And I think we’ve accomplished that. People I know come back to visit and they always comment on how great Vernonia looks.”

Some possibilities for the future include adding another clean up day to each year, having mini clean up days with a focus on a specific area, special days for tires or Hazardous materials removal, and involving clubs or organizations that would adopt an area to maintain. “We want Vernonia Pride to be by the people, for the community,” said Genny Fisher.

Through a commitment of service to the community, the folks of Vernonia Pride have shown just how much a community can accomplish when they work together and take pride in where they live. And it all started with a couple of women and a broom. And now I’ve got it too- “Vernonia Pride!”

The folks at Vernonia Pride would like to say “Thank You,” to over 300 volunteers and organizers who donated their time and effort this year to “Make Vernonia Shine.”

Vernonia Pride meets on the third Thursday of the month at 1 PM at the Vernonia Library. For more information please contact Genny Fisher at 429-4019.

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