



Quick-Rising Water Has Massive Impact

By Scott Laird



On December 3, 2007 history repeated itself in the Nehalem River Valley. What most residents of Vernonia, Mist and Birkenfeld hoped they would not see for another 100 years arrived at midmorning as Rock Creek and the Nehalem River overflowed their banks, reviving memories of the Flood of '96. Two hurricane type storms dumped a weekend full of rain

on the Vernonia area, over eighteen inches in forty-eight hours, with eleven and a half inches of rain in the twenty-four hours from 8 a.m. Sunday to 8 a.m. Monday. Quick-rising water caught most residents by surprise. Emergency personnel were activated and immediately put to work with hurried evacuations and then rescues. Unprepared homeowners and business owners could only watch as flood waters swept over their properties. The Flood of 2007 arrived swiftly leaving behind a community in turmoil.

"This wasn't '96," said Vernonia Fire Chief Paul Epler, "This was a different type of flood."

Epler knew there was going to be trouble when the first call came for a flooded basement at 5:30 a.m. When a check on the river gauge upstream showed water rising at one foot per hour, Epler began to expect the worst. "At 8:23 a.m. I put out an All Call asking for all volunteer First Responders to report to the fire station. By 9:00 a.m. I knew the downtown corridor was going to flood. We immediately started going door to door to encourage people to evacuate."

At 9:41 a.m. the first call came in reporting flooding south of Bridge Street at Madison and Jefferson Streets as water began to back up where Rock Creek meets the Nehalem. High water came across the sports fields behind the school buildings, and then entered the schools. Volunteers attempted to salvage as much food as possible from the cafeteria, wading through thigh deep water to reach the middle school. At 11:00 a.m., calls starting coming in from Mist Drive on the north end of town. At

noon calls started from the Timber Road area south of town. And then it just got worse. Residents could only watch as the water continued to rise, entering businesses, shops, garages, and homes in the low-lying areas.

Rescue resources were immediately stretched thin. "Anytime we have more than two calls in an hour we get maxed out," explained Chief Epler. "Calls were coming in every few minutes through out the afternoon. Declaration of Emergency was declared, with a Unified Command established between the Fire and Rescue and Police.

Evacuation centers were quickly established on high ground at the former Lincoln Grade School and then at St. Mary's Catholic Church and at Cedar Ridge Retreat Center on the other side of a divided town. Residents who were displaced found safety, hot meals, and cots at the centers.

Vernonia Mayor Sally Harrison was one of those affected by the flood. Her home on Mist Drive, overlooking the Nehalem River was flooded with about two feet of water. "Like everyone else, I kept thinking it was going to stop. I kept thinking it was not going to be as bad as '96. We just weren't prepared. And then it was too late to get out."



Harrison, who cares for her husband who is in the late stages of Alzheimer's, spent the night with her family in the second floor of their home.

The water continued to rise through the afternoon cutting the town of

Vernonia into sections, stranding many residents, some of whom had children they were unable to reach. Electrical power was cut off and local phone service disrupted, leaving many people in the dark and unable to make contact with loved ones.

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Article Generates Compassion for Local Family

By Scott Laird

The December 14 issue of the Oregonian featured a story that was close to the hearts of many Vernonians. The plight of Dean Schaumburg, his wife Kendra, and their one year old son Sylas was the focus of a front-page story that has elicited an overwhelming response from the Portland area.

Dean Schaumburg was injured in a logging accident in August. Dean suffered serious injuries including multiple spinal fractures, then suffering a stroke as hospital staff attempted to save his life. Dean fought hard and survived, and has been working his way through rehabilitation. Dean was getting ready to come home to Vernonia on December 6th to continue his recovery, but could not as the Schaumburg's home was flooded with over four feet of water. They lost almost everything.

Oregonian columnist Steve Duin wrote about the Schaumburg's situation eleven days after the flood. Duin suggested that Portland area readers who wished to help the Schaumburg family (Dean had no medical insurance when he was injured) send a donation to a Vernonia Post Office box. Over the weekend the Schaumburg's received hundreds of cards and letters. And they keep coming.

In a statement to Vernonia's Voice, the Schaumburg's expressed their gratitude for the support they had received. "We have been overwhelmed by the response to the Oregonian article. We want to say thank you to everyone, and especially to the town of Vernonia for all the fundraisers that were held earlier. The town has just been great. We can't say enough about what everyone has done to help."

Dean and Kendra's story gets just a little bit better. Vernonia residents Casey Mitchell and Dana Hyde and Mitchell's co-worker Bruce Holz undertook an amazing project. Inspired by the Schaumburg's situation and the article in the Oregonian, the trio have begun assembling contractors, supplies and other donations, and are on their way to being able to build the Schaumburgs a new home. Mike Pihl Logging has donated a 5,000 square foot lot on high ground to site the new structure. Mitchell has secured plans and other resources, including Suburban Door and Kemper Drywall, through his employment connections at Community Action Team in St. Helens. "We're far enough along now, I don't see how this won't happen for them," said Mitchell. "Dean is such a proud guy, we weren't sure how he would feel about someone building him a home. But he's given us the OK, so we're going to go forward."

Anyone interested in assisting the effort to help build the Schaumburg's new house can send donations to the Schaumburg Building Fund at PO Box 174, Vernonia, OR 97064. The PO Box for donations for the Schaumburgs living expenses is Box 41, Vernonia, OR 97064.