

Victims' Assistance - The Other Heroes

By Scott Laird

As the waters receded from the flood and Emergency First Responders moved from rescue to recovery, another group of volunteers stepped forward to help their community in its moment of need. As the Vernonia Community shook off the water on Tuesday morning, people began showing up at City Hall asking how they could help.

Pulling from their experience in dealing with the communities unmet needs after the '96 flood, Jim and Kim Tierney and Dan Brown quickly established a data bank to record damages sustained by victims of the flood. New leaders quickly emerged and stepped up to fill needed roles. Rebecca Wright and Sue Bailey began interviewing victims gathering important data that would get victims help as soon as possible. Jesse Jones, Director of the Community Learning Center, who lives in Portland and had been unable to reach Vernonia for two days, arrived and filled a needed supervisory role. Brenda Skeels began greeting and directing victims as they came to City Hall with questions. Brenda soon moved to volunteer coordination, a role later filled by Rose Peets and Jacob Lee, and as help began pouring in from outside the community the volunteer coordinators matched up resources and those wanting to help with those needing it. Julie Prohaska became the new greeter and information guru, welcoming victims with a friendly smile and a shoulder to lean on, a willing ear to listen, and helpful information. Donna Webb arrived and did a little of everything- as usual. Sue Wagner walked in and offered her organizational and data entry skills, and quickly assumed control of donations. Syn-da Allen, got the keys for Washington Grade School and set up the first donation center. Curtis Knight with the help of Aaron Hubbard and Will Charlton stepped up and organized the distribution center across from City Hall, supplying citizens with food for the first week and then cleaning supplies, space heaters and fire wood. Bud Dow, Dick Titus and the folks at Cedar Ridge graciously donated use of their properties for the recovery effort. A crew of people jumped in at the Vernonia Cares Food Bank, and with a host of volunteers cleaned up and sanitized the building, reopening in just six days. City Hall became a bee hive of activity. City staff, especially Joanne Glass, was overrun by phone calls, volunteers needing space to work and supplies, and requests for information. Joanne has to be considered one of the real heroes of the initial effort, as she worked tirelessly to meet all the demands placed on city staff.

"These people have just been outstanding," said interim City Administrator Aldie Howard. "Everyone has performed to a level that was just unexpected. Everyone has done the best they can."

As the second week began, more and more volunteers arrived and worked long, hard days. These volunteers are just too numerous to name, but they deserve the community's thanks and praise. You all know who you are! Those volunteers gave extensively of their time so that those affected by the flood could receive needed help and answers to their questions, food, clothing, supplies, and just a little peace of mind in the midst of terrible chaos. The Community of Vernonia can be proud of the way neighbors came forward to help their friends.

Temporary Shelter Sought

The Columbia County Flood Relief Center is looking for anyone who may own RVs, motorhomes, and trailers that they would be willing to lease through a responsible non-profit entity or directly to residents as temporary housing while flood affected homes are being repaired.

If you are interested in this opportunity please contact the Columbia County Flood Relief Resource/Donation phone number at (503) 791-9675. Thank you.

Outside Volunteers Make Huge Impact on Recovery Efforts

By Scott Laird

The influx of volunteers during the first few weeks of flood recovery and clean up was nothing short of amazing. Though way too numerous to list, the following is just a small sampling of some of the people who brought their skills, their hard work, and their generosity to help the Vernonia community.

The Yamhill Carlton School district came to Vernonia on a Friday, making a field trip for 140 students and twenty faculty members. Taft High School from Portland brought sixty students on a Monday. Many other school districts sent students to help.

Village Baptist Church was just one of many churches from throughout the area who came to help, bringing contracting skills, strong backs and helping hands. One volunteer leader joked on a Saturday that they were afraid no one would show up to volunteer on Sunday, because so many of Saturday's volunteers were from churches and they would all probably be attending services the next day.

Another great story was Dan Peel, from Phoenix, Arizona who was visiting friends in Portland when he heard about the flood. "I had a friend who lost everything twice, once in Katrina, and once before that," Dan told me. "That had a big impact on me. I just needed to come help."

Erin Enberg, aged 18 and a senior at Oregon Episcopal School in Portland helped organize a group of twelve students from her school. "My Mom was out the first weekend to help, and I wanted to do something, too. I brought up the idea to some friends, and then sent out an email to everyone." Erin's group spent

the day picking up garbage, first around the schools and then along the Nehalem River.

I spent some time talking with Shane Kenney who is a volunteer minister with the Churches of Scientology Disaster Relief program. Shane is the Director for the State of Oregon and a carpenter by trade. Shane explained that The Church of Scientology first got involved in disaster relief after the Oklahoma City bombing, and have given aid at the 911 sites, after hurricane Katrina, and in other spots all over the world. "We put out an international call to arms," explained Shane. "We helped with Katrina for three months. At 911 we did things like support the firefighters and police who were at the World Trade Center scene. We would cook and do their laundry, give support so they could go out and do their jobs."

During Vernonia's Flood of 2007, Shane showed up with a crew and built much needed shelves for the Vernonia Cares Food Bank. Shane brought his own workers who he paid to be here, and found other crews to come out and help. He also rounded up donations of lumber and supplies to build the shelving that is allowing the Food Bank to provide services for the community. "We are good at organizing help and getting things done," said Shane. "And this will be an ongoing thing. We will continue to call and ask what we can do to help."

The Vernonia community is fortunate and grateful for all the volunteers who have taken time away from their lives to help us in our time of need.

Vernonia Cares- Up and Running Again in Six Days

By Scott Laird

Just six days after their building took in over three feet of water, the Vernonia Cares Food Bank reopened to aid the community.

A group of dedicated volunteers rolled up their sleeves and got to work immediately. Leading the effort was Bob and Pat Stacklie. "My wife Patty was responsible for organizing the clean up. I took charge of fund raising," explained Bob. "The real story was that Cares Director Sandy Welch's house had been flooded, and there was no real leadership. Patty stepped up and said, "We need to get things done."

A huge part of the clean up effort was the Mormon Helping Hands Youth Group, who arrived with about fifteen members and removed the mud, mopped the floors, washed the walls and sterilized the building.

Bob, a retired Captain from Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue, started into his long list of contacts to raise funding support. "I am used to dealing in emergency situations," said Bob. "That was my profession. I know how to match resources with needs." Bob, an avid fisherman, put the word out on the web on some fishing boards, and got donations from all over the country. Intel donated new computers to get things back up and running. Bob made a trip to Standard TV and Appliance to purchase five freezers and three refrigerators that were needed to replace the storage space that was lost. Bill Gander, the owner of Standard TV and Appliance, donated three of each. Furniture was donated and delivered. Parr Lumber donated materials to build shelving. Safeway sent two trailers, one a freezer and one a refrigerator, to handle the overflow of food donations pouring into the community. Resources came from everywhere.

"The cleaning began on Wednesday, and we began receiving food back into the building on Saturday," said Bob.

Bob and Pat first got involved in Vernonia Cares in a supportive role. Pat started the Turkey drive held every holiday season that gives a holiday food box to families at Christmas. Pat collects donations and purchases Turkeys during Thanksgiving when the price is very low, then stores them until Christmas. "Pat is super shopper," said Bob. "She knows how to buy at discount and stretch the money." Last year Vernonia Cares supplied almost 200 families with a Christmas meal. This year was expected to be more.

The reopening of the Food Bank made a huge impact on the recovery efforts in the community. Moving the food supply back into the hands of the folks that know how to distribute it allowed other volunteers to concentrate on cleaning and building supplies, and clothing and furniture needs. This was a heroic effort, and all involved are to be commended.

