



Yes Vernonia, There is a Christmas!

Despite the flood waters that threatened to ruin the holiday season for families in Vernonia, the folks that organize the Toy and Joy program through Vernonia Fire and Rescue rolled up their sleeves and came through. With the help of outside donations that poured into the Vernonia Fire station, and the help of countless volunteers who showed up to wrap gifts on Saturday December 22nd, Toy and Joy was able to bring a little bit of happiness to those needing it the most.



"Usually we serve about forty families each year," said Coordinator Dan Owens, as he tried to manage the chaos of getting hundreds and hundreds of gifts sorted, wrapped, and ready for delivery. "This year we have had requests from over 100 families. Each family averages about 3-4 children, so that's 300-400 children we're helping this year. And we have more toys and gifts to give each child because of all the donations we've been given. It's just incredible."

Because of the generosity of those making donations and the hard work of the all the volunteers, Christmas still came to Vernonia, making the Holiday Season just a little bit brighter.



Quick-Rising Water Has Massive Impact (continued)



Governor Kulongoski arrives in Vernonia to assess the damage

Roads into Vernonia were closed leaving the community isolated with little access to those stranded in the surrounding areas.

Police Sergeant Mike Kay spent the early part of the day securing re-

sources for the shelters, including food and generators. "We commandeered the food from the schools, which would have been lost anyway. We needed to make sure they had heat and could cook at the shelters. The shelter at St. Mary's was virtually over run with 168 people staying there. It has a capacity of seventy."



Interim City Administrator, Aldie Howard, greets Governor Kulongoski at Spencer Field

Rescuers were hampered by strong currents. "We needed boats with certain capacities, larger boats that could get up stream," said Epler. "We had limited resources. We did get a lot of people who started responding in their own boats, going around looking for people to help."

Vernonia's Volunteer rescue personnel, who had been overwhelmed by requests for assistance throughout the day, finally had to discontinue rescue efforts in the evening. "It wasn't safe for our people out there," said Epler. "I didn't want to call it off, but I had to."

As morning dawned over the community, stunned residents found that the waters had begun receding. Rescue efforts were bolstered by the arrival of State Air National Guard Troops who used inflatable rafts and high clearance vehicles to help evacuate residents through out the morning. Now, the long slow process of damage assessment and recovery begins.



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