

## a letter from the editor....

Courage. Determination. Resiliency. Spirit. Strength.

These are all words that I have heard used (or used myself) to describe the members of our community during the flood of 2007, and during the first two months of our recovery. As we move from immediate assistance to that of rebuilding, one thing is becoming very clear. We must work together as a community; to repair the damages, to prioritize projects, to secure funding and resources, and to make decisions. Some of those decisions will be tough. This city, already in a difficult financial situation, now faces additional challenges and obstacles. We have a long road ahead of us. As we look to the future and begin to move forward, we need to do it together.

On January 17, Vernonians met in a number of venues and began the process of working together by talking as a community about possible solutions. The School Board held a special meeting asking for citizen input as to how they would like to see the board move forward. The opinions expressed by the audience indicate a feeling among the community that our current buildings are not safe; they are old, and now is the time to move on and build a new quality facility for our children. Resident Cici Bell expressed it best I think, "This is a chance to dream big."

The Vernonia City Council met with the Planning Commission later that same evening at the Scout Cabin in an emergency study session under the leadership of Interim City Administrator Aldie Howard. This session was designed to answer questions and establish clear priorities for how our city government will move forward in recovery. It is clear the work ahead is complicated and challenging, and again holds huge financial implications for the community. This group will be making major policy decisions regarding infrastructure repair, mitigation planning, and economic recovery.

One thing we have in our favor is the number of resources and agencies aware of our problem and who are taking an active role in our recovery. We have federal agencies involved. We have U.S. Senators visiting and attempting to secure funding. We have Governor Kulongoski who has called together a Recovery Cabinet that is meeting on a regular basis and is working on solutions. We have County Commissioner Tony Hyde, a Vernonia resident and a flood victim, working tirelessly to secure resources. And we have city staff and a host of volunteers who are working for the betterment of our community. It was heartening to see so many community leaders in the same room talking about the situation and starting to prioritize solutions.

Many of these decisions need to be made quickly as there are timelines we must meet in order to secure funding. Again, the ability of the community to work together and reach consensus to create logical and obtainable solutions will be key. We are on everybody's radar right now and many want to help us.

This event has also presented us with the opportunity to look at the big picture. Why are these floods happening? How are we interacting with our watershed? Should we be living and developing in a floodplain? What does it mean to be a community?

The third meeting held that evening was of a new Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Our community did an amazing job during this disaster. There were many heroes, and many people did amazing things. No one was killed or seriously injured. But there were many things we could have done better. A thorough examination of the community's ability to respond to a disaster is needed. The CERT training is a good start. An Early Warning System to alert residents is being discussed. Evacuation plans need to be revisited. Ways to control flood waters are being studied. And as FEMA, and almost anyone you talk to on the street is reminding us, this could happen again, at any time. What about personal preparation? Are you and your family ready for the next disaster? Do you have an emergency kit and a supply of water? Do you have a meeting place for your family if you live in an area that might be affected? These topics will be explored in more detail in the next issue of Vernonia's Voice.

The last item I want to address is the degree of selfless giving that we have witnessed. The volunteers and donations from outside the community have been overwhelming. And the dedication and caring being shown by members of the Columbia County Flood Relief team and other community volunteers has been unmatched. So many people have stepped up to help. I hope you all know how greatly this community appreciates what each and every one of you has given. You are shining examples that show the true spirit of working together – exactly what our community needs right now as we look to the future.

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**Thank you!**  
Evangeline and Scott

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