

Cedar Ridge – A Port in the Storm

By Scott Laird



Kris Thomsen, Director of Operations at Cedar Ridge Retreat Center

It didn't take Kris Thomsen long to get indoctrinated into the community of Vernonia.

Thomsen is the new Director of Operations at Cedar Ridge Retreat Center which became the main Emergency Shelter during the Flood of 2007. He found himself right in the middle of his new community when he assumed the role of host, information distributor, head cook, and chief dish washer as literally

hundreds of people turned up on his doorstep when the flooding hit.

"It just kind of took us over up here," said Thomsen as he recently reflected on the first few days of the flood. "And I sure got to meet and know a lot of people in the community really fast."

Thomsen, who moved to Vernonia with his wife in July, started his position at Cedar Ridge in October. On December 3, he received a call from the Vernonia Fire Department asking if he could handle it "if some people show up." He received a call from the Red Cross around 1:00 PM to confirm he was ready. And then, "hordes of people starting arriving," said Thomsen.

Thomsen, who has worked in catering and served as many as 1,500 people at a time, realized he better start preparing food. "I'm used to having some staff to help out, but I was all alone up here. A number of the displaced people stepped up and helped me out, and together we got the job done."

Thomsen was also concerned because his home on Rock Creek was being threatened with flood waters. "My wife was stuck in Portland, and I was running home every few hours to check on our place. The water came within six inches of coming over the bank. I was worried we were going to lose our brand new home. It made it difficult to focus on serving everyone else."

The Red Cross didn't officially show up until Thursday evening, leaving Kris to fend for himself for the first three days. "Supplies started showing up, and I wasn't really sure how to handle it all. I didn't really have places to put everything that was arriving."

Thomsen prepared three meals a day for hundreds for the first few days. Some teachers showed up and helped and Thomsen also praised Lisa Orth who helped him establish and run the shelter those first few days.

Cedar Ridge served as the disaster shelter for three weeks. The Red Cross presence took most of the burden from Kris when they arrived. He even hosted a planned wedding on the second Saturday after the flood, serving 200 guests while working around the hundreds of flood victims.

Thomsen reflected on his experience serving as the shelter for the community. He stressed the need for a more elaborate and thought out community disaster plan to be in place. He expressed concern that the Red Cross policy doesn't allow them to enter a community with all their resources until seventy-two hours after an event. "That is too long for a small rural community. I needed direction and help with logistics right away, and I was mostly on my own," said Thomsen. "It's really fortunate Vernonia has a facility like Cedar Ridge on high ground that can be used as a shelter in emergencies like this."

Thomsen also mentioned an interesting point: Cedar Ridge does not receive rent for use of their facility from the Red Cross; they only pay a portion of utilities and for any damages that are incurred. Cedar Ridge is still waiting for the Red Cross to take care of the bills that were submitted.

Thomsen now feels like he is really a part of his new community. "This is something I had never been through before. I feel really good that we were here," he said.

The Legend of Aldie Howard

What do Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, George Washington, J.R.R. Tolkien, Jerry Garcia, and Aldie Howard all have in common? OK, lot's of white hair, but what else? Give up?

They all have hotel rooms named after them at the McMenamins Grand Lodge in Forest Grove!

During a recent visit to the Grand Lodge a friend who knows Howard (Vernonia's new Interim City Administrator) mentioned they had heard there is a guest room named for Aldie Howard at the Lodge. All of the rooms at the McMenamins properties bear the names of "colorful and worthy characters who have notable associations to the hotel or the surrounding community," according to the list the lodge has available. A check with the desk clerk confirmed my friend's story. The list described Aldie Howard as "The Man Who Brought Liquor to Forest Grove." I was allowed to go visit the Aldie Howard room (#222) and discovered that the room contains a story painted on the walls. According to local legend, Aldie Howard in the early 1970's was able to convince the local city council of the then dry Forest Grove to allow him to begin selling alcohol at his local restaurant.

I don't want to tell you all the details of the Aldie Howard's story, you'll just have to visit the Grand Lodge yourself; better yet, stop and visit Aldie Howard in Vernonia and ask him to share the story of how he became a living legend in Forest Grove.

Makes me wonder, what's in store for Vernonia?

Dickerson Receives Endorsement

The Vernonia Police Association joined more than 45 Columbia County public safety servants and 14 county business owners in making up the first round of endorsements of the Dickerson For Sheriff campaign.

A total of 47 police, fire, dispatch and health workers have signed on to support Jeff Dickerson's candidacy in the initial round of endorsements announced Friday, February 1. Also included in the announcement are endorsements from City of Scappoose Mayor Scott Burge and City of Rainier Mayor Jerry Cole. The Vernonia Police Association was one of three police unions thus far giving strong approval of the campaign, voting unanimously to support the Dickerson effort.

"I'm honored and humbled by the support of those with whom I work on a daily basis," Dickerson said.

The official initial listing of civic leaders, public safety servants and business owners endorsing the Dickerson For Sheriff campaign can be found at www.dickerson4sheriff.com.

Additional business and public safety support is in the wings, the campaign said. "Look for more endorsement announcements in the near future," said Campaign Manager Andy Moyer.



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