

## Local Receives Real Estate Award

By Evangeline Doyle

Every year John L. Scott Realty presents a Rookie of the Year award. This award is open to new agents doing transactions in the state of Oregon and SW Washington. The agent who has closed the most transactions in the past eighteen months receives the award.



This year, Sharon Bernal, local business owner and Vernonia native won the Rookie of the Year. Interestingly enough, she has only been selling real estate for nine months (not eighteen). Sharon closed a total of twenty-eight transactions, twenty of which were in Vernonia.

While Sharon is new to the title of "agent," she is not new to the business of real estate. Sharon attributes her success to a few key things, one of which is her thirty-two years in the title and escrow industry. There she daily interacted with real estate brokers, lenders and appraisers. "The appraisal of a home is one of the most important aspects of a real estate transaction," said Sharon.

"When all is said and done," says Sharon, "The house you're about to sell or buy must appraise-out, or a lender won't make the loan. The only escape from this scrutiny is selling a home for cash -- but this is not the norm. Approximately ninety-five percent of residential real estate transactions involve a lender.

"Buying and selling property is an emotional transaction to begin with. I help the seller with setting a price based on the facts (or comparables), not on emotion," said Sharon. This way we can count on a smooth transaction, one the buyer, lender and seller are willing to enter into."

Sharon attributes her other key to success to the relationships she establishes with her buyers and sellers. From working with buyers to find the perfect home, to helping sellers market their property. "Buyers need to be able to see themselves in the home... not the seller," that is critical says Sharon.

With a successful thirty-plus year career in the title and escrow industry, why the change? "When I first started out in the escrow and title industry I loved it. I was meeting with customers daily, there was people-time. But over the years I went from closing twenty transactions a month to closing eighty or more...leaving little if any time for relationships. I missed the people," explained Sharon "that's my favorite part of real estate."

## School District Considers Options (cont.)

Dr. Cox said, "New schools in a safe location will have a positive impact on the economic future of Vernonia. We want to work with the city in determining the best location of those schools to provide for the future growth for our community."

The idea of relocating the campus was suggested almost immediately after the flood and is beginning to gain momentum with members of the community. The district has received a concept plan for a new campus from Dull Olson Weekes Architects (DOWA), an architectural and design firm which has previous experience designing school campuses. The concept was created to give the district and board an idea how much space would be required to site a new facility and is not a final plan. The design concept that has been developed shows a site between thirty and forty acres with an estimated cost of between \$35 and \$50 million. The school district has begun working with the Bridges Planning Group to include public input into design concept planning and site location criteria.

"We want community input on what they would like best in a school site, then we can consider the different sites in light of that information and determine which one best fits our needs." Cox said.

The district has identified four locations as potential sites for a new facility: 1) on the south end of town at the top of Bridge Street near the cemetery, 2) south of town behind the Storage Too property, 3) on OA Hill behind Spencer Field, and 4) on the north end of town at Knott Street. These properties were identified as possible sites based on their meeting initial basic criteria. The sites were then rated by the architectural firm on their potential as actual sites. The board has authorized Dr. Cox to begin initial discussions with property owners to determine actual availability.

Dr. Cox went on to explain, "We will be taking a more detailed look at some of these sites, and we are not ruling out the possibility that there may be other sites out there. We do hope, however, to narrow the search to only a couple of sites rather quickly."

This brings us to the next big question, and in some community members' minds their only real objection to moving the schools, how will Vernonia pay for a project of this magnitude?

"I have been in nearly weekly conversations with legislative staff, both state and federal, about our situation. We will leave no financial rock unturned as we work to get as much funding as possible for new schools. The board has even authorized funding for a Capital Projects Funding Coordinator to head this effort for the district." Cox said. He also indicated that though federal and state funding may be limited, the district will also be seeking foundation and private funding and are considering the possibility of a local bond for at least some portion of the cost.

One thing is clear: there will be no easy answers to the questions Vernonia faces about what to do with its schools. These are large financial decisions which will affect Vernonia and its citizens for years to come.

## Vernonia Amateur Radio Operators Are Active

Vernonia Emergency Radio Association (VERA) would like to thank all the local amateur radio operators for their time and expertise during the flood of December 2007. They would also like to thank the amateurs who came to Vernonia and helped from outside our local area as well as Western Oregon Relay Club (WORC) and Oregon Radio Relay Group (ORRG) for allowing District 1, Washington County ARES, and other responders to use their repeater systems for communications during our emergency and recovery process.

For those that elect to donate to their favorite charities through United Way, VERA is now a participating recipient. Donations to VERA can assist with improving radio equipment at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and ensuring the local repeater is robust and reliable. Additionally, funds can be used

to assist Vernonia Amateur Radio Communications to interface with ODAN, the new digital system that will be installed at all County EOC's and at the State Office of Emergency Management. This program allows for easier use and quicker information transfer. Once immediate emergency and priority traffic has been handled, the same system can be used for Health and Welfare messages. (Health and Welfare messages are a way to get information out to your families anywhere in the world when the phone system is down to let them know you are safe.)

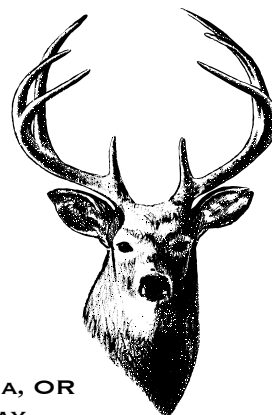
VERA would like to announce a new meeting time. They will meet the second Tuesday of every month at 7 pm at Mariolino's and hope to see more Amateur Radio Operators join them. For more information on becoming an Amateur Operator please contact Dawn Moss - KE7HHI, Secretary, at 503-608-2643.

## Avamere - St. Helens Reopens After Flood

Avamere at St. Helens is a premier Independent, Assisted Living and Memory Care community scheduled to "re-open" its doors to the public April 2008. Avamere at St. Helens was temporarily closed due to the December 3, 2007 storm which affected much of Columbia County. Kevin Reed, Administrator at St. Helens Avamere said "All 80 of our residents were safely evacuated the day of the flood which was of the highest importance to us. We now have rebuilt what was damaged in the flood and have what looks like a brand new building for our residents to come home to."

Avamere at St Helens features four Independent Cottages, fifty-five Assisted Living apartments and a fourteen-unit Memory Care wing. Other unique features include a library with computer, a therapy spa room, beauty and barber shop, elegant living and dining areas, nutritional program brought to you by our culinary team, full time on-site licensed nurse with twenty-four-hour caregiver assistance, assistance with medication management and activities of daily living and interactive and creative activity programs.

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