

Vernonia Schools Working to Be More Healthy

By Scott Laird

The Vernonia School District (VSD) has embarked on a new program to promote healthier life styles and encourage disease prevention and early detection. The project, entitled "Healthy kids learn better, healthy teachers teach better-Taking one step at a time", is being funded by two mini grants from the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Public Health Division.

Ederlinda Ortiz-Clawson, Columbia Health District - Public Health, is helping implement the program in the Washington Grade School and the Vernonia High School: she said the project began before the flood in Vernonia but has now become even more significant. "It makes good sense to combine recovery with improving overall health outcomes," said Ortiz-Clawson.

The project calls for the development of an advisory council. Program Coordinator, George Spaulding, Washington Grade School PE Teacher, pulled together key community members and VSD staff to create the Vernonia School Health Advisory Council (VSHAC). The VSHAC was instrumental in providing all teachers and staff of the Vernonia School District pedometers that allow tracking of how far someone walks during a day. "We are encouraging them to walk as many as 10,000 steps which equates to five miles each day. But we want people to just increase physical activity period," said Ortiz-Clawson. "This has really caught the interest of the students. They have been checking in with their teachers, asking how far they've walked today and challenging them. It's been really encouraging to see the interest level."

The program began with completion of a Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) school health index tool that gives some baseline information about the Vernonia School system. There are eight different components that focus on different health factors. Based on assessment results, the VSHAC promotes mental health activities, looks at barriers to healthy activities and encourages things like after school walks, healthy breakfasts that include fruits and remembering to stand and stretch throughout the day.

On the day Vernonia's Voice visited the schools, teachers were receiving twenty-minute massages from students from Cambridge College in Beaverton. The massage students had volunteered their time while earning a chance to practice their craft. "This community has gone through so much, and these teachers are struggling, having to work out of the modules," said Barbara Pickle, Program Manager at Cambridge. "We are giving them twenty minutes of relief, just a chance to not think about all the stress."

We spoke with Washington Grade school Principal Aaron Miller right after he received his massage. "I have been involved in this program from the beginning. We are trying to take care of both ends. These massages are beneficial in one way. But we are also purchasing PE equipment and air scrubbers to help with the general health of the buildings. The pedometers have raised interest levels throughout the school system. We are even letting the kids check out the pedometers during recess because they have expressed interest in them. It's great to see everyone enthused and getting competitive with themselves."

"This project has opened our eyes and showed us what we need to work on," said Miller "We are learning that attitudes are the initial step."

For more information about the VSHAC or to get involved, contact George Spaulding at 503-429-7941.

Vernonia's Washington Grade School Holds Kindergarten Round-Up

On Friday, May 23, Washington Grade School will be holding a "Kindergarten Round-Up" to begin the enrollment process for students entering kindergarten next fall. Students must be 5 years old on, or before, September 1, 2008 to be eligible for kindergarten registration. WGS also requires a birth certificate and immunization records for enrollment.

Anyone with students entering kindergarten next year, or who know of any other families who do, please put this date on your calendar, and notify the Washington Grade School office (503-429-7941) that you have a child that will be starting kindergarten next year.

"Early registration allows us to pre-plan and be better prepared for the upcoming year," said Principal Aaron Miller.

Hearing, vision and basic health and learning screenings will be available as part of this roundup, as well as lots of informational items about programs and services that are available through local agencies and our school. More details will be made available in May.



Curl's Bus Service Continues in Vernonia

By Scott Laird

Rob Curl, owner of the local transportation service for the school district, can't say enough about his employees and the job they did during the flood in December of this past year. And he also can't say enough about the people and the community of Vernonia.

"Our drivers demonstrated real loyalty during the aftermath of the flood, not just to our company but to the community at large. They showed incredible commitment," said Curl.

As people know, Vernonia's schools were severely damaged during the flooding, causing the school district to send high school and middle school students to Scappoose, 23 miles away. The logistics of getting the students there and back each day in winter weather fell on Curl and his employees who have been providing Vernonia's School bus service since 1976.

"What was supposed to be a few weeks turned into a few months," said Curl. "Many of our drivers had to quit their other jobs. They made the kids in this community the priority."

What was even more amazing was that Curl's Bus Service was in the middle of negotiations to renew their contract to provide service for the Vernonia District. "We didn't even know if we were going to have jobs for our people when the school board made their decision," explained Curl. "The flood was a chance for us to demonstrate who we are as a company. It was the ultimate test."

Curl was bidding against the largest school bus service company in the world (First Student) and the second largest in the state of Oregon. Curl's is one of only four private contractors left in the state of Oregon. Curl's was awarded the contract by the school board in March.

Curl praised all his drivers' efforts during the months following the flood but mentioned Joann Beamish, a thirty year veteran driver, and Shelley Cota in particular. "Shelley is our new driver supervisor. Shelley spent hours and hours figuring out the logistics of getting all the kids all the places they needed to go. She also really gathered the support of all the drivers to make this happen."

"I believe we provide the best service for Vernonia. We have an excellent safety record," said Curl. "We had great community support throughout the negotiations. We seem to be well-liked, and I think the town wasn't ready for a new company here."

Equestrian Team Rode Season Strong

By Coach Diane Benes

After a rough start last December, the Vernonia High School Equestrian team was able to ride away from their last meet with their heads held high. The winter made opportunity to practice almost impossible due to the flooding, freezing rain, and snow. In spite of these obstacles, the riders were able to end the season well. I am very proud of the good attitudes and success of the whole team!

The team consisted of eight riders this year, Seniors: Marissa Clement and Bryan Benes; Juniors: Ashley Paleck and Allee Chadek; Sophomore: Jamie Benes; and Freshmen: Brianna Carr, Chantel Szlavich, and McKenzie Tarkelson. Four were returning riders who started their freshman year.

The April meet ended with the drill team placing 2nd enabling them to go to the State Finals. Many riders placed in the top 15; Barrels - Brianna, 11th place, CA Flag team - Bryan, Jamie, Brianna, and Ashley, 6th place overall; Team Penning "A" team - Bryan, Jamie, and Brianna, 9th place overall; Team Penning "B" team - Marissa, McKenzie, and Ashley, 10th place overall; Trail - McKenzie, 1st place, 9th overall; Bi-rangle - Bryan and Jamie, 15th place overall; Reining - Bryan 6th place; IHOR - Marissa, Allee, Brianna, and McKenzie 11th place.

All the students showed great improvement and placed higher each meet. I am very pleased with the outcome of our season. I want to give credit to the riders and their parents for their time and commitment to make their team a priority! We are all looking forward to the upcoming State Finals in May.

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