

Fun on Two Wheels – Welcome to Vernonia

By Scott Laird

A movement is underway in Vernonia, and it's rolling forward mostly on two wheels.

The community of Vernonia is attempting to embrace all things cycling: bicycling that is, as a way to promote economic development, attract visitors, provide more healthy activities for youth and adults, and put Vernonia on the map for something other than celebrity loggers and flooding.

Why is Vernonia looking to bicycling as the next big thing? With the recent increases in fuel costs, Portlanders are going to be looking for activities that are closer to home. More and more adults are getting back into the sport of bicycling as an exciting and adventurous activity or as a way to stay healthy and get exercise. In fact, at the recent Oregon Bicycling Summit in Portland, Tim Blumenthal of the Bikes Belong Coalition in Boulder, Colorado, stated "Bicycling is the new golf," noting that aging baby boomers are looking for safe and healthy ways to stay active. And the nation continues to search for answers to the childhood obesity crisis, looking for ways to encourage youth to get outdoors and get active. Vernonia is hoping to become an answer to all of these.

Vernonia's bicycle renaissance started with a visit from Cycle Oregon in 2005 during their weeklong ride. The city embraced the 2,000 riders and was so welcoming and accommodating that Cycle Oregon chose to make Vernonia the focus of their weekend ride during the summer of 2007. Again, Vernonians welcomed the riders with open arms.

Meanwhile, Columbia County was taking the final steps to begin construction of the Crown- Zellerbach (or CZ) Trail, a linear trail linking Vernonia to the north with Scappoose and the Columbia River. With the long established Banks-Vernonia Linear Trail connecting Vernonia to the south, Vernonia found itself in the exact center of a potential forty-six mile linear trail. Add in the proposed opening of Oregon's newest full service State Park - L.L. "Stub" Stewart State Park ten miles south of Vernonia that features miles of multi-use trails including planned mountain bike trails - and the stage was set.

Vernonia decided to make a place for itself and began development of the Vernonia Bicycle Skills Park, a mountain bike skills development facility on seventy acres of abandoned mill property. The Skills Park will be for all ages and is set to include a dirt jump park, trails with technical trail features like teeter-totters, ramps, bridges and log rides, and a skateboard park. "There is nothing like this in the state of Oregon right now," said Chris Bernhardt, a former rep for the International Mountain Bicycling Association



(IMBA) during a recent visit to the proposed Skills Park site.

With miles and miles of logging roads in the immediate vicinity, there is the potential for exponential growth of mountain biking opportunities in and around Vernonia.

Vernonia continues to be a destination for road riders looking for scenic roadways with plenty of climbs. The "Vernonia Century", the loop from Portland out Highway 30 to Scappoose, up and over the Scappoose- Vernonia Highway to Vernonia, and down Highway 47, which then returns to Portland via Highway 26 is a favorite ride. The Banks-Vernonia Linear Trail was severely damaged during recent flooding this past winter, but the hope is that it would be repaired in time for this summer season. The CZ Trail is still in the development stages, but parts of it are able to be ridden for adventurous souls. The Vernonia Bicycle Skills Park has trails carved out on the site, and plans are in place to create skills obstacles and the dirt jump park this summer. Some members of the local community are pushing for more bike paths and possibly bike lanes around town, hoping to make the town more bike-friendly and encourage more ridership. The opening this past year of Barlow Bikes and Boards, a full service bike shop, has completed the scene.

So as more Americans get back on their bicycles this summer, Vernonia finds itself on two wheels on the way to becoming a bicycling destination and attraction for riders of all ages, skill levels and interests.

Oregon Bicycle Summit: Harnessing Passion and Energy

By Scott Laird

On April 4-5, 2008 over 150 bicycle advocates, enthusiasts, industry experts, and political leaders gathered in Portland for the third Oregon Bicycle Summit. The summit was sponsored by a number of organizations including Travel Oregon, Bicycle Transportation Alliance, Oregon Department of Transportation, Oregon State Parks, and others; it was organized by Cycle Oregon. The Summit's mission was to gather together top bicycle advocates from around the state and the country to discuss strategy and plans for making Oregon the premiere cycling destination in the United States.

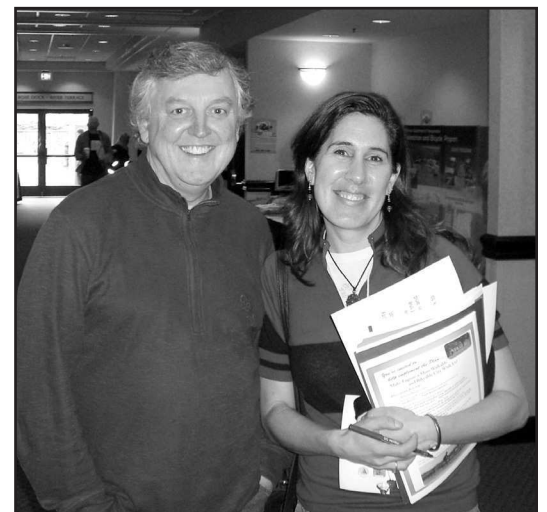
Among the Keynote speakers was Hill Abel, President of the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA). On Saturday Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer, who is co-chair of the Congressional Bike Caucus in Washington, D.C., and a spokesperson for livable communities, addressed the summit. Congressman Blumenauer spoke about the need for bicycle advocates to create a good story and narrative about why bicycling is important and how it makes a difference and then get political with that message.

The group also heard from Tim Blumenthal, the Executive Director of Bikes Belong Coalition, a national group whose mission is to get more people on more bikes, more often. Bikes Belong is a sponsor of the Vernonia Bicycle Skills Park that is currently in development. Blumenthal spoke about what he sees as Ten Opportunities to get more support for bicycling (federal bike spending is up, obesity crisis needs a solution, bike share programs in cities are about to become reality, aging baby boomers are looking for exercise options, it's a viable transportation option, etc.) and also addressed five threats along with some tipping points that will help make bicycling more mainstream.

It was a divergent group that gathered including representatives of the tourism industry, local parts manufactures, bike shop operators, city, county and state officials, state parks representatives, all kinds of cyclists, and representatives from numerous bicycle advocacy groups.

There were two breakout sessions where attendees could hear experts talk about planning events, creating more bike friendly communities, how to affect public policy, and creating successful partnerships. There was also an afternoon session devoted to creating strategy plans for promoting growth in bicycle tourism, transportation and industry.

There were lunchtime presentations by Gail Achterman, Chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission, who spoke about including more bicycle alternatives and support in the Oregon Transportation Plan, and by Robert Ping from the National Safe Routes to School program which encourages children to use alternative forms of transportation to go to school each day. Closing the conference was Oregon State Representative Jackie Dingfelder who is running for State Senate on a platform that includes her passion for bicycles as a means of transportation.



Vernonia Bear Creek 10K/5K Run/Walk Event Planned



Mark your calendars – August 16, 2008 is the date for the sixth annual Bear Creek Run/Walk. Beginning and ending at Anderson Park, this event boasts the diversity of a 5K Run/Walk encompassing a lap of Vernonia Lake, and a 10K Run that heads south along the Banks/Vernonia Linear Trail. Both routes are flat, fast and wind through tree-lined sections of the trail, providing welcome shade for runners & walkers alike.

This event is a fundraiser for the Vernonia Cares Food Bank

– an organization that has supported local families for the past 23 years. Local businesses have already received letters reaching out for sponsorship and support of this event. The food bank appreciates the financial sponsorship received during the past five years from businesses, both local and outside of Vernonia. This year shows a sponsorship total of \$500 so far. Great start!

How can you help? Volunteer as this event is planned and enacted, become a sponsor, enter the race as an individual or group, or come cheer on those who run or walk. Be there at the finish line! It is said that charity begins at home – this is a chance to role model that through all levels of support for this event.

Registration will begin at 7:45 am on August 16 in Anderson Park, Vernonia, with the events starting at 8:15 and 8:30 am. Online registration is encouraged. Rewards are available for those who register before Aug. 1. Watch for more local advertising and race registration forms as sponsors are finalized. See the following website for more details; <http://www.signmeup.com/57993> or contact Maria Lemay, Race Director at (503) 429 1069.