

Volunteer Firefighter Profile: Dean Smith

By Scott Laird

Firefighter, Emergency Medical Service, and Citizen Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers fill a crucial role in small rural communities. They spend many hours of their time receiving their initial training and certification and then many more hours on required continuing training and education. They respond to our emergencies at all hours of the day and night. Because we all have such busy schedule, and many local residents commute out of town for work, our local departments sometimes have trouble filling volunteer positions. In this series of articles, Vernonia's Voice will profile some of our local volunteers who sacrifice week in and week out to help keep our community safe.

Dean Smith moved to Vernonia in 1987 and graduated from Vernonia High School in 1989. He joined the Vernonia Fire Department in 2003 for a number of different reasons. "I had always wanted to join because I knew people who were volunteers with the Department," said Smith. "But I always worked out of town, and I wasn't available."

Smith, who works as an auto mechanic, eventually began working for himself in Vernonia and then was witness to an event that encouraged him to take the leap and join. Rob Richards, who owns R & R Motors and is Smith's current employer, lost his garage and shop to a fire. "There were not enough responders," said Smith, "and Rob lost everything."

Smith, promoted to Lieutenant last year, was just recently promoted again to Deputy Chief along with Ben Davis. Smith also serves as President of the Volunteer Association so he has taken on a lot of responsibility.

Because he works here in town, Smith is often the fallback guy. In addition to fighting fires, the fire department responds on almost all medical calls in order to assist the EMT's. They help with lifting patients and extrications from auto wrecks, and they assist with needed equipment. So anytime there is a siren in town, someone has to drop everything and go. Richards, as Smith's boss, has been extremely flexible, says Smith. "I can't thank Rob enough for working with me and the department. It really helps the community to have a business that allows volunteers to serve."

There is still a lack of daytime responders - trained

volunteers who are available because they work in Vernonia during the day. Smith was able to immediately name three instances when they didn't have the personnel to respond properly and had to find either local residents to assist or call for outside agencies to respond. That kind of situation can be dangerous for department volunteers as well as residents.

"People need to know that we are all volunteers except the Chief," said Smith. "Chief Epler works Monday through Friday during the day. Someone has to be on duty to respond on nights, weekends and holidays." The duty officers, Smith, Davis and their Lieutenants, cover those shifts. At the time we spoke, the Department was in the process of interviewing to fill those Lieutenant positions. That means Smith was on duty either every second or third night.

Smith says he likes helping his community. He has been named Firefighter of the Year, Volunteer of the Year four times, and Officer of the Year. He has been attending additional trainings since being promoted to Deputy Chief and is learning ways to improve communication and recruitment. "I would like to see us get more help," said Smith.

And the most important part: "None of us could do what we do without the support of an understanding family," said Smith in closing.



Beaverton Eagle Scout Makes Donation to Vernonia

Ted Rautio, a Boy Scout from Beaverton's Troop 208, has completed his Eagle Scout Project and donated it to the City of Vernonia.

Rautio built ten picnic tables that were donated to the Vernonia City Parks, and he also made a cash donation of \$600 to Columbia County Flood Relief.

"I wanted to build something as my project and decided on picnic tables," said Rautio. "Then I thought about places where they would be needed. I knew about the flood here in Vernonia and thought it would be a perfect place where they would be needed."

The tables took two days to build once the lumber had been secured.

Terry Tobin, an Optometrist who had an office in Vernonia for many years before the flood, has been acting as Rautio's mentor and made the first suggestion of Vernonia. "He was a big part of this project," said Rautio.



AmeriCorp - Hard at Work in Vernonia, Again

By Scott Laird

The second group of AmeriCorp Volunteers has come and gone from Vernonia, leaving behind a legacy of hard work, a helpful attitude and cheerful smiles.

The Blue 1 Team finished a six week stay in Vernonia in mid- July having assisted numerous homeowners with repairs and maintenance around flood recovery. "We have been tearing out and installing insulation, taping and mudding drywall, and helping with all kinds of personal unmet needs for flood victims," said Meagan Stokes, 23, who is from Kentucky. When asked about her experience in Vernonia, Stokes had this to say, "Vernonians are some of the sweetest people I have ever encountered. Everyone has been warm, friendly

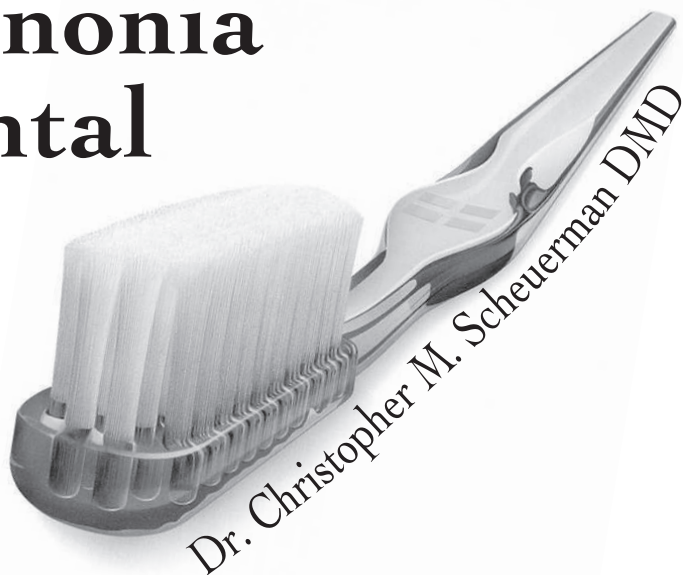
and nice. All of our other projects this year have been in large cities. And I'm from a small town, so it was nice to spend time here and meet these people."

The AmeriCorp teams that spent time in Vernonia this spring and summer were part of the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) program. Team mem-



bers are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four and commit to ten months of service work in exchange for room and board and a \$4,725 educational award that can be used for tuition or to repay student loans. The teams usually work on four separate projects that last for about six weeks each and focus on areas of education, public safety, disaster relief, environmental conservation, or community needs. The AmeriCorp teams in Vernonia have worked in coordination with Columbia County Flood Relief under the supervision of Robb Wilson.

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